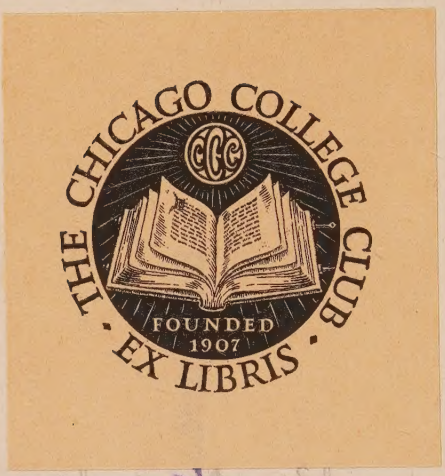
FIFTY CONTEMPORARY ONE-ACT PLAYS

FRANK SHAY
AND
PIERRE LOVING



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FIFTY CONTEMPORARY ONE-ACT PLAYS

SELECTED AND EDITED

BY

FRANK SHAY

AND

PIERRE LOVING

Second Impression

CINCINNATI

STEWART & KIDD COMPANY

PUBLISHERS

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First Printing, January, 1921
Second Printing, July, 1921

INTRODUCTION

Tradition in the sphere of books is relentlessly imperious and will not be denied. The present anthology of one-act plays, in defiance of a keen reluctance on the part of the editors, is condemned at birth to the heritage of a title; for this practice, as is well known, has been the unchallenged punctilio of book-making and book-editing from time immemorial. And yet if the truth be told, the editors have found precisely this to be by far the most embarrassing of the various tasks that have arisen in connection with the project. In the selection of a title, the immediate problem was of course to avoid, so far as possible, the slightest pretense or assumption of categorical standards of choice or even the merest intimation that there existed somewhere, attainable or unattainable, an ideal norm according to which one-act plays could be faultlessly assessed and pigeon-holed.

In point of fact, so many tolerably good one-act plays are being written and acted nowadays, that the editors early concluded that the business of editing a volume of fifty one-act pieces implies, so to speak, inviting the devil or the spirit that denies to the feast. Thus all manner of obstinate ribaldries and mischief began to infest our path of progress.

If it were only a naïve question of adjudging a golden apple to one of three lovely women, earthly or divine, the matter would have proved comparatively simple; but the question was more complex: it offered the public a meager book which could never hope to compress within itself the core and quiddity of about a thousand plays, or more, which the editors were privileged to examine from the first moment when they launched upon their task eight months ago, to this. Moreover it frequently happened that when the editors had flattered themselves on having picked a sure winner, the sure winner forthwith got out of hand and no persuasive cajolings availed to allure it back. In other words, not a few plays which the editors sought to include in the book were found unavailable by reason of previous copyrights. In several cases the copyright had passed entirely out of the control of the author or his accredited representative.

On the whole, however, both authors and those commissioned to act for them have responded most sympathetically to the project and have rendered valuable assistance and support, without which, let me hasten to add, the present collection would not have been possible.

The reader will observe that plays by American authors predominate over those of any other single country, and the reason for this is fairly obvious. American plays, besides being most readily available to the anthologist, are beginning to reflect the renascence that is gradually taking place in the American theater. There is growing up in this country a younger generation of dramatists, which is achieving its most notable work outside the beaten path of popular recognition, in small dramatic juntos and in the little theaters. In the main, the form they employ as being most suitable to their needs, is that offered by the concise scaffold of the one-act play. These efforts, we hold, deserve a wider audience.

On the other hand, a mere scrutiny of the table of contents will reveal that the editors have included a number of foreign plays heretofore not accessible to English-speaking readers. This aspect of the task, the effort of pioneer exploration, has indeed been by far the most pleasant, and most pleasant, too, has proved the discovery of several new American writers who have produced original work. Of the foreign writers, such men as Wied and Speenhof, for example, are practically if not totally un-

known to American readers, and they, as well as a handful of others, are in the opinion of the editors worthy of an American following.

As concerns the procedure or technic of choice, it goes without saying, surely, that if a congruous method exists at all, it merely embodies a certain permissible viewpoint. This viewpoint will probably find unqualified favor with but a handful of readers; others it will frankly outrage to the extent of their casting it out, lock, stock and barrel. But this is to be looked for in an undertaking of this caliber in which individual bias, after all, plays so leading a part. And titling the volume came to be an arduous process only in virtue of the afore-mentioned viewpoint, cherished but shadowily defined, or to be exact, in virtue of the despair which succeeded upon each persistent attempt to capture what remained perennially elusive. Unfortunately it still remains elusive. If then a rationalization is demanded by the reader — a privilege none will question his right to exercise — he will, I am afraid, have to content himself with something as vague and fantastic as the following:

Imagine a playhouse, perfectly equipped, plastic and infinitely adaptable. Invite Arthur Hopkins, John Williams, Winthrop Ames, Sam Hume and George Cram Cook to manage it; let them run riot on the stage. Clear the wings and the front of the house of all routineers. Fill the seats at each performance with the usual gallery-haunters of the New York theaters. Do not overlook the hosts of experimental playhouse directors — unleash them in the backyard area with a *kammerspielhaus* to toy with at pleasure. Let the personnel of the play-reading committee consist of such men as Ludwig Lewisohn, Barrett H. Clark, George Jean Nathan and Francis Hackett. The result will take care of itself. This, in brief, is the theatrical ménage for which, in the main, the plays included in this volume were written.

Is this a hair-brained or a frivolous notion? It may be. But, please note, it expresses, no matter how limpingly, some approach to a viewpoint. At all events it is the only touchstone applied by the editors in their choice of fifty contemporary one-act plays.

PIERRE LOVING.

New York City, Sept., 1920.

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MADONNA DIANORA

A Play in Verse

By Hugo Von Hofmannsthal

Translated from the German by Harriet Betty Boas.

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MADONNA DIANORA

A Play in Verse

By Hugo von Hofmannsthal

La demente: *"Conosci la storia di Madonna Dianor?"*
Il medico: *"Vagamente. Non ricordo piu."* . . .
Sogno d'un mattino di primavera.

[Scene: *The garden of a sombre Lombardian Palace. To the right the wall of a house, which is at an angle with the moderately high garden wall that encloses it. The lower portion of the house is built of rough granite, above which rests a strip of plain marble forming a sill, which, under each window, is adorned with a lion's head in repose. Two windows are visible, each one having a small angular balcony with a stone railing, spaced sufficiently to show the feet of those standing there. Both windows are curtained to the floor. The garden is a mere lawn with a few scattered fruit trees. The corner of the garden between the wall and the house is crowded with high box wood bushes. A leafy grapevine, trained over stunted chestnut trees, forms an arbor which completely fills the left side of the stage; only this entrance is visible. The arbor slants irregularly to the left rear. Behind the rear wall there may be seen (by the gallery spectator) a narrow path beyond which is the neighbor's garden wall — no house is visible. In the neighbor's garden and as far as the eye can reach, the tops of the trees are illuminated by the evening glow of a brilliant sunset.*]

Dianora [*at the window*].
A harvester I see, and not the last,
No, not the last, descending from the hill.
There are three more, and there, and there!
Have you no end, you never-ending day?
How have I dragged the hours away from you,
Torn them to shreds and cast them in the flood,
As I do now with these poor tattered blooms!
How have I coaxed each minute of this day.
Each bracelet, and each earring was clasped on,
Ta'en off again, then once more tried, until
'Twas thrown aside, exchanged, and others brought —
I slowly dripped the fountain, drop on drop
All through my tresses, dried them languidly;
With quiet, measured step, out in the sun
I walked me to and fro — oh! to and fro!
But 'twas still damp — the path is narrow there.
I looked among the bushes, for the birds,—
Less than a zephyr's breath I bent them back,
Those swaying branches, sat 'neath rustling trees,
And felt on cheeks and hands in waiting woe
The little flickerings of warm sunshine.
I closed my eyes, and almost thought soft lips
Gently caressing, strayed my clammy brow.
Sometimes hours come when this duplicity,
All this concealment, seems so fruitless, and
I cannot bear it. I can only gaze
With eyes of steel far up into the sky
Where flocks of wild geese float, or bend me low
O'er some mad, rushing plunging waterfall
That tears my weakling shadow with its flow,—
I will be patient— why, I must, I am! —
Madonna — I will climb the steepest mount

And on my knees will count me every stone
With this, my rosary, if only now,
Oh, soon,— this day will sink into the night.
It is so long! I have its measured tread
With these same beads been scanning o'er and o'er.
And now I talk so fev'rishly, instead
Of counting all the leaves upon that tree.
Oh! I have finished much too soon again.
See! See the yeoman, calling to his dog.
The shadows do upon his garden fall,
For him the night has come, but brings no joy;
He fears it, locks his door and is alone.—
See where the maidens wander to the well.
I know the manner in which each of them
Will fill her bucket — that one's prettiest.
Why does the stranger at the cross roads stay?
Distant's his goal, I warrant. He unwinds
And folds again the cloth about his feet.
What an existence! Draw the thorns, yes, draw
Them quickly out. You must speed. We all
Must hurry on, the restless day must down
And with it take this bright and scarlet glow
That's lingering in radiance on my cheeks.
All that is troubling us cast far away,
Fling wide the thorn into the field
Where waters flow and sheaves of brilliant flow'rs
Are bending, glowing, yearning towards the night.—
I draw my rings from off my fingers, and
They're happy as the naked children are
Who scamper quickly to the brook to bathe.—
Now all the girls have gone —
Only one maiden's left. Oh, what lovely hair!
I wonder if she knows its beauty's power?
Perhaps she's vain — but vanity, thou art
A plaything only for the empty years.
When once she has arrived where I am now,
She'll love her hair, she'll let it clasp her close,
Enwrap her round and whisper to her low,
Like echoing harpstrings throbbing with the touch
Of fev'rish fingers straying in the dark.
[*She loosens her hair and lets it fall to the left and to the right in front of her.*]
What, would you close to me? Down, down with you.—
I bid you greet him. When the dusk has come,
And when his hands hold fast the ladder there
A-sudden he will feel, instead the leaves,
The cool, firm leaves, a gently spraying rain,
A rain that falls at eve from golden clouds.
[*She lets her hair fall over the balustrade.*]
You are so long, and yet you barely reach
A third the distance; hardly are your ends
Touching the cold, white marble lion's nose.
[*She laughs and rises.*]
Ah! there's a spider! No, I will not fling
You off; I lay my hand once more
Upon this spot, so you may find again
The road you wish to speed so quickly on.
How I have changed! I am bewitched indeed!
In former days, I could not touch the fruit
Within a basket, if upon its edge
A spider had been seen. Now in my hand
It runs.—Intoxication makes me glad!
Why, I could walk along the very edge
Of narrow walls, and would not totter— no!—
Could I but fall into the waters deep!
In their cool velvet arms I would be well,
Gliding in grottoes of bright sapphire hues
Playing with wondrous beings of the deep
All golden-finned, with eyes benignly sad.
Yes, if I were immured in thickest woods
Within some ruined walls, my soul were free.
For there the forest's animals would come
And tiny birds. The little weasels would

Brush up against and touch my naked toes
With their soft snouts and lashes of bright eyes
While in the moss I lay and ate wild fruit.—
What's rustling? 'Tis the little porcupine
Of that first night. What, are you there again,
Stepped from the dark? Art going on the hunt?
Oh! If my hunter would but come to me!
[*Looking up.*]
Now have the shadows vanished! Gone are all
Those of the pines and those of the knolls,
The ones that played about the little huts,
The large ones from the vineyards and the one
Upon the figtree at the crossroads — gone
As though the quiet earth had sucked them in!
The night has really come! The lamp
Is placed upon the table, closely press
The sheep together — close within the fold.
Within the darkest corners of the eaves
Where thickest vine-leaves meet, goblins do crouch,
And on the heights from out the clearing step
The blessed saints to gaze where churches stand
Well pleased at seeing chapels manifold.
Now, sweetest plaything, you may also come,
Finer than spider's web, stronger than steel.
[*She fastens one end of the silk ladder to an iron hook on the floor in the balcony.*]
Let me now play that it were highest time
And dip you deep down, down into my well,
To bring this parchéd one a sparkling draught.
[*She pulls the ladder up again.*]
Night, night has come! And yet how long might be,
Endlessly long, the time until he comes.
[*She wrings her hands.*]
Might be!
[*With shining eyes.*]
But must not — yet, it might —
[*She puts up her hair. During this time the nurse has stepped to the front window and waters the red flowers there.*]

DIANORA [*much frightened*]. Who's there, who's there! Oh, nurse, nurse, is it you? I've ne'er before seen you in here so late. Has ought occurred? —

NURSE. Why nothing, gracious one. Do you not see, I quite forgot my flowers — they've not been watered. On my way from church I suddenly remembered, quickly came.

DIANORA. Yes, give the flowers water. But how strange you look, your cheeks are feverish, your eyes are shining —

NURSE [*does not answer*].

DIANORA. Who preached? Tell me, was it that monk, the one —

NURSE [*curtly*]. Yes, gracious one.

DIANORA. The one from Spain, is it not?

NURSE [*does not answer — pause*].

DIANORA [*following her own train of thoughts*]. Can you recall the kind of child I was?

NURSE. Proud, gracious one, a proud child, very proud.

DIANORA [*very softly*]. How singular! Humility's so sweet! — What? —

NURSE. I said no word, my gracious Lady, none —

DIANORA. Yes, yes, whom does the Spanish monk resemble?

NURSE. He is different from the others.

DIANORA. No — his appearance! Does he resemble my husband?

NURSE. No, gracious one.

DIANORA. My brother-in-law?

NURSE. No.

DIANORA. Ser Antonio Melzi?

NURSE. No.

DIANORA. Messer Galeazza Swardi?

NURSE. No.

DIANORA. Messer Palla degli Albizzi?

NURSE. His voice is a little like Messer Palla's — yes — I said to my son yesterday, that his voice reminded me a little of Messer Palla's voice.

DIANORA. The voice —

NURSE. But his eyes are like Messer

Guido Schio, the nephew of our gracious lord.

DIANORA [*is silent*].

NURSE. I met him on the stairs yesterday — he stopped —

DIANORA [*suddenly flaring up*]. Messer Palla?

NURSE. No! Our gracious lord. He ordered me to make some ointment. His wound is not yet entirely healed.

DIANORA. Oh, yes! The horse's bite — did he show it to you?

NURSE. Yes — the back of the hand is quite healed, but on the palm there's a small dark spot, a curious spot, such as I've never seen in a wound —

DIANORA. What horse did it, I wonder?

NURSE. The big roan, gracious Lady.

DIANORA. Yes, yes, I remember. It was on the day of Francesco Chieregati's wedding. [*She laughs loudly.*]

NURSE [*looks at her*].

DIANORA. I was thinking of something else. He told about it at table — he wore his arm in a sling. How was it, do you remember?

NURSE. What, gracious one?

DIANORA. With the horse —

NURSE. Don't you remember, gracious one?

DIANORA. He spoke about it at table. But I could not hear it. Messer Palla degli Albizzi sat next to me, and was so merry, and everybody laughed, so I could not hear just what my husband said.

NURSE. When our gracious lord came to the stall, the roan put back his ears, foamed with rage and suddenly snapped at the master's hand.

DIANORA. And then?

NURSE. Then the master hit the roan behind the ears with his fist so that the big, strong horse staggered back as though it were a dog —

DIANORA [*is silent, looks dreamily down*].

NURSE. Oh, our gracious lord is strong! He is the strongest gentleman of all the nobility the country 'round, and the cleverest.

DIANORA. Yes, indeed. [*Attentively now.*] Who?

NURSE. Our master.

DIANORA. Ah! our master. [*Smiles.*] — and his voice is so beautiful, and that is why everybody loves to listen to him in the large, dark church.

NURSE. Listen to whom, gracious one?

DIANORA. To the Spanish monk, to whom else?

NURSE. No, my Lady, it isn't because of his voice that people listen to him.

DIANORA [*is again not listening*].

NURSE. Gracious one — my Lady — is it true — what people say about the envoy?

DIANORA. What envoy?

NURSE. The envoy whom the people of Como sent to our master.

DIANORA. What are people saying?

NURSE. They say a shepherd saw it.

DIANORA. What did he see?

NURSE. Our gracious lord was angry at the envoy — would not accept the letter that the people of Como had written him. Then he took it anyhow — the letter — read part of it, tore it into bits and held the pieces before the envoy's mouth and demanded that he swallow them. But the envoy went backwards, like a crab, and made stary eyes just like a crab, and everybody laughed, especially Signor Silvio, the master's brother. Then the master sent for the envoy's mule and had it brought to the gates. When the envoy was too slow in mounting, the master whistled for the dogs. The envoy left with his two yeomen. Our master went hunting with seven men and all the dogs. Towards evening, however, they say that our gracious lord, and the envoy met at the bridge over the Adda, there where Varese begins — our master and the envoy met. And the shepherd was passing and drove his sheep next to the bridge into a wheatfield — so that the horses would not kill them. And the shepherd heard our master cry, "There's the one who wouldn't eat, perhaps he'd like to drink." So four of our men seized the two yeomen, two others took the envoy, each one took hold of a leg, lifted him from the saddle — threw him screaming like a madman and struggling fiercely, over the parapet — he tore out a piece of the sleeve of one, together with the flesh. The Adda has very steep banks at that place — the river was dark and swollen from all the snow on the mountains. The envoy did not appear again, said the shepherd.

[*Nurse stops, looks questioningly at Dianora.*]

DIANORA [*anxiously*]. I do not know.

[*She shakes off the worried expression, her face assumes the dreamy, inwardly happy expression.*]

DIANORA. Tell me something about his preaching — the Spaniard's preaching.

NURSE. I don't know how to express it, gracious one.

DIANORA. Say just a little. Does he preach of so many things?

NURSE. No, almost always about one thing.

DIANORA. What?

NURSE. Of resignation to the Lord's will.

DIANORA [*looks at her and nods*].

NURSE. Gracious one, you must understand, that is all.

DIANORA. What do you mean by — all —

NURSE [*while speaking, she is occupied with the flowers*]. He says that all of life is in that — there's nothing else. He says everything is inevitable and that's the greatest joy — to realize that everything is inevitable and that is good, and there is no other good. The sun must glow, the stone must be on the dumb earth and every living creature must give utterance to its voice — whether he will or no — we must —

DIANORA [*is thinking — like a child*].

NURSE [*goes from window. Pause*].

DIANORA.

As though 'twere mirrored in a placid pool
Self-prisoned lies the world asleep, adream —
The ivy's tendrils clamber through the dusk
Closely embracing thousandfold the wall.
An arbor vitae towers. At its feet
The quiet waters mirror what they see.
And from this window, on this balustrade
Of cool and heavy stones, I bend me o'er
Stretching my arms so they may touch the ground.
I feel as though I were a dual being
Gazing within me at my other self.

[*Pause.*]

Methinks such thoughts crowd in upon the soul
When grim, inexorable death is near.

[*She shudders and crosses herself.*]

NURSE [*has returned several times to the window; in one hand she carries scissors with which she clips the dry branches from the plants*].

DIANORA [*startled*]. What? Good night, nurse, farewell. I'm dizzy, faint.

NURSE [*goes off*].

DIANORA [*with a great effort*]. Nurse! Nurse!

NURSE [*comes back*].

DIANORA. If the Spanish monk preaches to-morrow, I'll go with you.

NURSE. Yes, to-morrow, my Lady, if the Lord spare us.

DIANORA [*laughs*]. Certainly,— if the Lord spare us. Good night.

[*A long pause.*]

DIANORA.

His voice is all he has, the stranger monk,
Yet people flock, hang on his words like bees
Upon the dark sweet blossoms, and they say
"This man is not like others — he
Does shake our souls, his voice melts into space,
Floats down to us, and penetrates our being —
We are all like children when we hear his voice."—
Oh, if a judge could have his lofty brow,
Who would not kneel upon the steps to read
Each sentence from his clear and shining brow.
How sweet to kneel upon the lowest step
And know one's fate were safe within that hand,
Within those kingly, good and noble hands.

* * *

And oh, his merriment! How exquisite!
To see such people merry is a joy,
— He took me by the hand and drew me on.
My blood ran magic, backward stretched my hand.
The laughing throng upon it closely hung
A sinuous chain, we flew 'long arbored walks
Down through a deep and steep and narrow path
Cool as a well, and bordered very close
With cypresses that lived a century —
Then down the brightest slope.

Up to my knees the wild, warm flowers kissed
Where we were running like a breeze in May.
Then he released me, and alone he leapt
Upon the marble stairs between cascades
Astride he sat upon the dolphin's back
And held himself up on the arms of fauns,
Upon the dripping Tríton's shoulders stood
Mounting always; high, higher still he clomb,
The wildest, handsomest of all the gods!—
Beneath his feet the waters bubbled forth,
They sparkled, foamed, and showered the air with spray,
Falling on me. The waves' tumultuous din
Drowned out, engulfed the entire world,
Beneath his feet the waters bubbled forth,
They sparkled, foamed and showered their spray on me.

[*Pause — footsteps are heard in the distance.*]

DIANORA. Sh! Footsteps! No, it is so much too soon — And yet — and yet — [*long waiting*] they come.

[*Pause.*]

They do not come —
Oh, no, they do not come — They're shuffling steps,
They shuffle down the vineyard — now they reel —
There are the steps! A drunkard, verily!
Stay in the street, intoxicated one.
What would you do within our garden gates? —
No moon shines here to-night — were there a moon
I were not here — no, no, I were *not* here.
The little stars are flick'ring restlessly,
They cannot light the way for such as you,
Go home! I too wait for a drunken one.
But one not drunken from a musty wine.
His footsteps are as light as wind on grass
And surer than the tread of the young lion.

[*Pause.*]

These hours are martyrdom! No, no, no, no,
They're not — no, they are beautiful and good,
And lovely and so sweet! He comes, he comes;
A long, long way already he has walked —
The last tall tree down there has seen him come —
It could — if that dark strip of woodland boughs
Did not obscure the road — and 'twere not dark —

[*Pause.*]

He comes — as certainly as I do now
Upon this hook bind this frail ladder — comes.
As surely as I now do let it down
In rustling murmur in the leaves enmeshed,
As certainly as it now swaying hangs,
Quivering softly as I bend me low,
Myself aquiver with a greater thrill —

She remains for a long time bent over the balustrade. Suddenly she seems to hear the curtain between her balcony and the room thrown back. She turns her head and her features are distorted in deathly fear and terror. Messer Braccio stands silently in the door. He wears a simple, dark green robe, carries no weapons — his shoes are low. He is very tall and strong. His face resembles the portraits of aristocrats and captains of mercenaries. He has an extremely large forehead and small dark eyes, closely cropped, curly black hair and a small beard that covers his cheeks and chin.]

DIANORA [*wants to speak, but is unable to utter a sound*].

MESSER BRACCIO [*beckons to her to pull up the ladder*].

DIANORA [*does so like an automaton and drops the bundle, as in a trance, at her feet*].

BRACCIO [*looks at her quietly, reaches with his right hand to his left hip, also with his left hand; notices that he has no dagger. He moves his lips impatiently, glances toward the garden, then over his shoulders. He lifts his right hand for a moment and examines his palm, then walks firmly and quickly back into the room*].

DIANORA [*looks after him incessantly; she cannot take her eyes away from him.*

As the curtain closes behind his retreating form, she passes her fingers excitedly over her face and through her hair, then folds her hands and murmurs a prayer, her lips wildly convulsed. Then she throws her arms backwards and folds them above the stone pillar, in a gesture that indicates a desperate resolve and a triumphant expectancy].

BRACCIO [*steps into the doorway again, carrying an armchair, which he places in the opening of the door. He seats himself on it, facing his wife. His face does not change. From time to time he raises his right hand mechanically and examines the little wound upon his palm*].

BRACCIO [*his tone is cold, rather disdainful. He points with his foot and eyes to the ladder*]. Who?

DIANORA [*raises her shoulders, and drops them slowly*].

BRACCIO. I know!

DIANORA [*raises her shoulders and drops them slowly. Her teeth are clenched*].

BRACCIO [*moves his hand, barely glances at his wife, and looks again into the garden*]. Palla degli Albizzi!

DIANORA [*between her teeth*]. How ugly the most beautiful of names becomes when uttered by unseemly tongue.

BRACCIO [*looks at her as though he were about to speak, but remains silent. Pause*].

BRACCIO. How old are you?

DIANORA [*does not answer*].

BRACCIO. Fifteen and five. You are twenty years old.

DIANORA [*does not answer. Pause*].

DIANORA [*almost screaming*]. My father's name was Bartholomeno Colleone — you can let me say the Lord's Prayer and the Hail Mary, and then kill me, but not let me stand here like a fettered beast.

BRACCIO [*looks at her as though surprised; does not answer — glances at his hand*].

DIANORA [*strokes back her hair slowly, folds her elbows over her breast, stares at him, then drops her arms, seems to divine his plan. Her voice is completely changed and is like a string that is stretched to the breaking-point*].

One of my women I desire, who will —

[*She stops; her voice seems to give out.*]

First braid my hair — 'tis tangled, disarranged.

BRACCIO. You often help yourself without a maid.

DIANORA [*presses her lips together, says nothing, smoothes her hair at the temples, folds her hands*].

I have no children. My mother I saw once —
I saw her once, just before she died.
My father led me and my sister to
A vaulted, high, severe and gloomy room.
The suff'rer I saw not; her hand alone
Hung like a greeting to me — that I kissed.
About my father I remember this.
He wore an armor of green burnished gold
With darker clasps — two always helped him mount
Upon his horse, for he was very old —
I hardly knew Medea. Not much joy,
Had she, my sister. Thin of hair,
Her forehead and her temples older seemed,
Much older, than her mouth and hands to me—
She always held a flower in her hand.—
O Lord, have mercy unto these sweet souls
As unto mine, and bid them welcome me,
Greeting me kindly when I come to Thee.
I cannot kneel — there is no space to kneel.

BRACCIO [*rises, pushes the chair into the room to make space for her. She does not notice him*].

DIANORA.

There's more — I must remember — Bergamo,
Where I was born — the house in Feltre where
The uncles and the cousins were. . . .
Then they put me upon a gallant steed
Caparisoned most splendidly — they rode,
Cousins and many others by my side.
And so I came here, from whence now I go. . . .

[*She has leaned back and looked up at the glittering stars upon the black sky — she shudders*].

I wanted something else —

[*She searches her memory.*]

In Bergamo where I was taught to walk
Upon the path that brought me here, I was
Often — most frequently through pride, — and now
I am contrite and would go to confession
For all those errors, and some graver ones;—
When I [*She ponders.*] — three days after Saint Magdalen
Was riding homeward from the chase with him.
This man here, who's my husband — others too —
Upon the bridge an old lame beggar lay.
I knew that he was old and ill and sore
And there was something in his tired eyes
Reminded me of my dead father — but
Nevertheless — only because the one
Riding beside me touched my horse's bridle,
I did not pull aside, but let the dust
My horse kicked up, blind, choke that poor old man.
Yes, so close I rode that with his hands
He had to lift aside his injured leg.
This I remember, this I now regret.

BRACCIO. The one beside you held your horse's bridle? [*He looks at her.*]

DIANORA [*answers his look, understands him, says trenchantly*]:
Yes! Then as often since — as often since —
And yet how rarely after all!
How meager is all joy — a shallow stream
In which you're forced to kneel, that it may reach
Up to your shoulders —

BRACCIO. Of my servants who,—of all your women, Who knew of these things?

DIANORA [*is silent*].

BRACCIO [*makes a disdainful gesture*].

DIANORA.
Falsely, quite falsely, you interpret now
My silence. How can I tell who might know? —
But if you think that I am one of those
Who hides behind her hireling's her joy,
You know me ill. Now note — note and take heed.
Once may a woman be — yes, once she may
Be as I was for twelve weeks — once she may be
If she had found no need of veil before,
All veiled, protected by her own great pride
As by a shield — she once may rend that veil,
Feel her cheeks crimson, burning in the sun.
Horrible she, who twice could such a thing!
I'm not of these — that surely you must know.
Who knew? — Who guessed? I never hid my thoughts!
Your brother must have known — just as you knew,
Your brother just as you. Ask him, ask him!
[*Her voice is strange, almost childlike, yet exalted.*]
That day — 'twas in July, Saint Magdalen
Francesco Chieregati's wedding day —
That nasty thing upon your hand came then,
Came on that day. Well, I remember too
We dined out in the arbor — near the lake,
And he sat next to me, while opposite
Your brother sat. Then passing me the fruit,
Palla did hold the heavy golden dish
Of luscious peaches so that I might take.
My eyes were fastened on his hands — I longed
To humbly kiss his hands, there,— before all.
Your brother — he's malicious and no fool —
Caught this my glance, and must have guessed my thought.
He paled with anger.— Sudden came a dog,
A tall dark greyhound brushed his slender head
Against my hand — the left one by my side,—
Your stupid brother kicked in furious rage
With all his might, the dog — only because
He could not with a shining dagger pierce
Me and my lover. I but looked at him.

Caressed and stroked the dog, and had to laugh

[*She laughs immoderately and shrilly in a way that threatens to be a scream, or to break into tears at any moment.*]

BRACCIO [*seems to listen*].

DIANORA [*also listens. Her face expresses horrible tension. Soon she cannot bear it, begins to speak again almost deliriously*].

Why whosoever saw me walk would know!
Walked I not differently? Did not I ride
Ecstatically? I could look at you
And at your brother and this gloomy house
And feel as light as air, floating in space.
The myriad trees seemed all to come to me
Filled with the sunlight dancing toward me,
All paths were open in the azure air —
Those sunlit paths were all the roads to him.
To start with fright was sweet — he might appear
From any corner, any bush or tree —

[*Her language becomes incoherent from terror, because she sees that Braccio has drawn the curtains behind him close. Her eyes are unnaturally wide open — her lips drawn more constantly.*]

BRACCIO [*in a tone that the actor must find for himself, not loud, not low, not strong, nor yet weak, but penetrating*].

If I, your husband, had not at this hour
Come to your chamber to fetch me a salve,
An ointment for my wounded hand —
What would —
What had you done, intended, meant to do?

DIANORA [*looks at him, as though distraught, does not understand his latest question. Her right hand presses her forehead — with the left she shakes the ladder before his face, lets it fall at his feet, one end remains tied, shrieks*].

What had I done? What had I done, you ask?
Why, waited thus — I would have waited — so!

[*She sways her open arms before him like one intoxicated, throws herself around, with the upper part of her body over the balustrade, stretches her arms towards the ground — her hair falls over them.*]

BRACCIO [*with a hurried gesture tears off a piece of his sleeve and winds it around his right hand. With the sureness of a wild animal on the hunt, he grasps the ladder that is lying there, like a thin, dark rope, with both hands, makes a loop, throws it over his wife's head and pulls her body towards him.*]

[*During this time the curtain falls.*]

LITERATURE

A Comedy

By Arthur Schnitzler

Translated by Pierre Loving.

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PERSONS

MARGARET.
CLEMENT.
GILBERT.

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LITERATURE

A Comedy

By Arthur Schnitzler

[Scene: *Moderately well, but quite inexpensively furnished apartments occupied by Margaret. A small fireplace, a table, a small escritoire, a settee, a wardrobe cabinet, two windows in the back, entrances left and right.*

As the curtain rises, Clement, dressed in a modish, tarnished-gray sack suit, is discovered reclining in a fauteuil near the fireplace. He is smoking a cigarette and perusing a newspaper. Margaret is standing at the window. She walks back and forth, finally goes up directly behind Clement, and playfully musses his hair. Evidently she has something troublesome on her mind.]

Clem. [*reading, seizes her hand and kisses it*]. Horner's certain about his pick and doubly certain about mine; Waterloo five to one; Barometer twenty-one to one; Busserl seven to one; Attila sixteen to one.

Marg. Sixteen to one!

Clem. Lord Byron one and one-half to one — that's us, my dear.

Marg. I know.

Clem. Besides, it's sixteen weeks yet to the Handicap.

Marg. Evidently he looks upon it as a clean "runaway."

Clem. Not quite — but where did you pick up your turf-lingo, Brava?

Marg. Oh, I used this kind of talk before I knew you. Is it settled that you are to ride Lord Byron yourself?

Clem. How absurd to ask! You forget, it's the Damenpreis Handicap. Whom else could I get to ride him? And if Horner thought for a moment that I wasn't going to ride him, he'd never put up one and a half to one. You may stake all you've got on that.

Marg. I'm well aware of that. You are *so* handsome when you mount a horse — honest and truly, too sweet for anything! I shall never forget that day in Munich, when I first made your acquaintance —

Clem. Please do not remind me of it. I had rotten luck that day. But you can believe me, Windy would never have won if it weren't for the ten lengths he gained at the start. But this time — never! You know, of course, it is decided; we leave town the same day.

Marg. Same evening, you mean.

Clem. If you will — but why?

Marg. Because it's been arranged we're to be married in the morning, hasn't it?

Clem. Quite so.

Marg. I am so happy. [*Embraces him.*] Now, where shall we spend our honeymoon?

Clem. I take it we're agreed. Aren't we? On the estate.

Marg. Oh, of course, later. Aren't we going to take in the Riviera, as a preliminary tidbit?

Clem. As for that, it all depends on the Handicap. If we win —

Marg. Surest thing!

Clem. And besides, in April the Riviera's not at all good *ton*.

Marg. Is that your reason?

Clem. Of course it is, my love. In your former way of life, there were so few opportunities for your getting a clear idea of fashion — Pardon me, but whatever there was, you must admit, really had its origin in the comic journals.

Marg. Clem, please!

Clem. Well, well. We'll see. [*Continues reading.*] Badegast fifteen to one —

Marg. Badegast? There isn't a ghost of a show for him!

Clem. Where did you get that information?

Marg. Szigrati himself gave me a tip.

CLEM. Where — and when?

MARG. Oh, this morning in the Fredenau, while you were talking with Milner.

CLEM. Now, look here; Szigrati isn't fit company for you.

MARG. Jealous?

CLEM. Not at all. Moreover, let it be understood that from now on I shall introduce you everywhere as my fiancée. [*Margaret kisses him.*]

CLEM. Now, what did Szigrati say?

MARG. That he's not going to enter Badegast in the Handicap at all.

CLEM. Well, don't you believe everything Szigrati is likely to say. He's circulating the rumor that Badegast will not be entered so that the odds may be bigger.

MARG. Nonsense! That's too much like an investment.

CLEM. So you don't believe there is such a thing as investment in this game? For a great many it's all a commercial enterprise. Do you think that a fellow of Szigrati's ilk cares a fig for sport? He might just as well speculate on the market, and wouldn't realize the difference. Anyway, as far as Badegast is concerned, one hundred to one wouldn't be too much to put up against him.

MARG. Really? I found him in first-rate fettle this morning.

CLEM. Then you saw Badegast, too?

MARG. Certainly. Didn't Butters put him through his paces, right behind Busserl?

CLEM. But Butters isn't riding for Szigrati. He was only a stableboy. Badegast can be in as fine fettle as he chooses — it's all the same to me. He's nothing but a blind. Some day, Margaret, with the aid of your exceptional talent, you will be able to distinguish the veritable somebodies from the shams. Really, it's remarkable with what proficiency you have, so to speak, insinuated yourself into all these things. You go beyond my expectations.

MARG. [*chagrined*]. Pray, why do I go beyond your expectations? All this, as you know, is not so new to me. At our house we entertained very good people — Count Libowski and people of that sort — and at my husband's —

CLEM. Quite so. No question about that. As a matter of principle, you realize, I've no grudge against the cotton industry.

MARG. Even if my husband happened to be the owner of a cotton mill, that didn't have to effect my personal outlook on life, did it? I always sought culture in my own way. Now, don't let's talk of that period of my life. It's dead and buried, thank heaven!

CLEM. Yes. But there's another period which lies nearer.

MARG. I know. But why mention it?

CLEM. Well, I simply mean that you couldn't possibly have heard much about sportsmanship from your friends in Munich — at least, as far as I am able to judge.

MARG. I do hope you will stop tormenting me about those friends in whose company you first made my acquaintance.

CLEM. Tormenting you? Nonsense! Only it's incomprehensible to me how you ever got amongst those people.

MARG. You speak of them as if they were a gang of criminals.

CLEM. Dearest, I'd stake my honor on it, some of them looked the very picture of pickpockets. Tell me, how did you manage to do it? I can't understand how you, with your refined taste — let alone your purity and the scent you used — could have tolerated their society. How could you have sat at the same table with them?

MARG. [*laughing*]. Didn't you do the same?

CLEM. Next to them — not with them. And for your sake — merely for your sake, as you know. To do them justice, however, I will admit that many bettered upon closer acquaintance. There were some interesting people among them. You mustn't for a moment believe, dearest, that I hold myself superior to those who happen to be shabbily dressed. That's nothing against them. But there was something in their conduct, in their manners, which was positively revolting.

MARG. It wasn't quite so bad.

CLEM. Don't take offense, dear. I said there were some interesting people among them. But that a lady should feel at ease in their company, for any length of time, I cannot and do not pretend to understand.

MARG. You forget, dear Clem, that in

a sense I'm one of them — or was at one time.

CLEM. Now, please! For my sake!

MARG. They were artists.

CLEM. Thank goodness, we've returned to the old theme.

MARG. Yes, because it hurts me to think you always lose sight of that fact.

CLEM. Lose sight of that fact! Nonsense! You know what pained me in your writings — things entirely personal.

MARG. Let me tell you, Clem, there are women who, in my situation, would have done worse than write poetry.

CLEM. But what sort of poetry! What sort of poetry! [*Takes a slender volume from the mantel-shelf.*] That's what repels me. I assure you, every time I see this book lying here; every time I think of it, I blush with shame that it was you who wrote it.

MARG. That's why you fail to understand — Now, don't take offense. If you did understand, you'd be quite perfect, and that, obviously, is impossible. Why does it repel you? You know I didn't live through all the experiences I write about.

CLEM. I hope not.

MARG. The poems are only visions.

CLEM. That's just it. That's what makes me ask: How can a lady indulge in visions of that character? [*Reads.*] "Abandoned on thy breast and suckled by thy lips" [*shaking his head*]. How can a lady write such stuff — how can a lady have such stuff printed? That's what I simply cannot make out. Everybody who reads will inevitably conjure up the person of the authoress, and the particular breast mentioned, and the particular abandonment hinted at.

MARG. But, I'm telling you, no such breast ever existed.

CLEM. I can't bring myself to imagine that it did. That's lucky for both of us, Margaret. But where did these visions originate? These glowing passion-poems could not have been inspired by your first husband. Besides, he could never appreciate you, as you yourself always say.

MARG. Certainly not. That's why I brought suit for divorce. You know the story. I just couldn't bear living with a man who had no other interest in life than eating and drinking and cotton.

CLEM. I dare say. But that was three years ago. These poems were written later.

MARG. Quite so. But consider the position in which I found myself —

CLEM. What do you mean? You didn't have to endure any privation? In this respect you must admit your husband acted very decently toward you. You were not under the necessity of earning your own living. And suppose the publishers did pay you one hundred gulden for a poem — surely they don't pay more than that — still, you were not bound to write a book of this sort.

MARG. I did not refer to position in a material sense. It was the state of my soul. Have you a notion how — when you came to know me — things were considerably improved. I had in many ways found myself again. But in the beginning! I was so friendless, so crushed! I tried my hand at everything; I painted, I gave English lessons in the pension where I lived. Just think of it! A divorcee, having nobody —

CLEM. Why didn't you stay in Vienna?

MARG. Because I couldn't get along with my family. No one appreciated me. Oh, what people! Did any one of them realize that a woman of my type asks more of life than a husband, pretty dresses and social position? My God! If I had had a child, probably everything would have ended differently — and maybe not. I'm not quite lacking in accomplishments, you know. Are you still prepared to complain? Was it not for the best that I went to Munich? Would I have made your acquaintance else?

CLEM. You didn't go there with that object in view.

MARG. I wanted to be free spiritually, I mean. I wanted to prove to myself whether I could succeed through my own efforts. And, admit, didn't it look as if I was jolly well going to? I had made some headway on the road to fame.

CLEM. H'm!

MARG. But you were dearer to me than fame.

CLEM [*good-naturedly*]. And surer.

MARG. I didn't give it a thought. I suppose it's because I loved you from the very start. For in my dreams, I always conjured up a man of your likeness.

I always seemed to realize that it could only be a man like you who would make me happy. Blood — is no empty thing. Nothing whatever can weigh in the balance with that. You see, that's why I can't resist the belief —

CLEM. What?

MARG. Oh, sometimes I think I must have blue blood in my veins, too.

CLEM. How so?

MARG. It's not improbable?

CLEM. I'm afraid I don't understand.

MARG. But I told you that members of the nobility were entertained at our house —

CLEM. Well, and if they were?

MARG. Who knows —

CLEM. Margaret, you're positively shocking. How can you hint at such a thing!

MARG. I can never say what I think in your presence! That's your only shortcoming — otherwise you would be quite perfect. [*She smiles up to him.*] You've won my heart completely. That very first evening, when you walked into the café with Wangenheim, I had an immediate presentiment: this is he! You came among that group, like a soul from another world.

CLEM. I hope so. And I thank heaven that somehow you didn't seem to be altogether one of them, either. No. Whenever I call to mind that junto — the Russian girl, for instance, who because of her close-cropped hair gave the appearance of a student — except that she did not wear a cap —

MARG. Baranzewitsch is a very gifted painter.

CLEM. No doubt. You pointed her out to me one day in the picture gallery. She was standing on a ladder at the time, copying. And then the fellow with the Polish name —

MARG. [*beginning*]. Zrkd —

CLEM. Spare yourself the pains. You don't have to use it now any more. He read something at the café while I was there, without putting himself out the least bit.

MARG. He's a man of extraordinary talent. I'll vouch for it.

CLEM. Oh, no doubt. Everybody is talented at the café. And then that yokel, that insufferable —

MARG. Who?

CLEM. You know whom I mean. That fellow who persisted in making tactless observations about the aristocracy.

MARG. Gilbert. You must mean Gilbert.

CLEM. Yes. Of course. I don't feel called upon to make a brief for my class. Profligates crop up everywhere, even among writers, I understand. But, don't you know it was very bad taste on his part while one of us was present?

MARG. That's just like him.

CLEM. I had to hold myself in check not to knock him down.

MARG. In spite of that, he was quite interesting. And, then, you mustn't forget he was raving jealous of you.

CLEM. I thought I noticed that, too. [*Pause.*]

MARG. Good heavens, they were all jealous of you. Naturally enough — you were so unlike them. They all paid court to me because I wouldn't discriminate in favor of any one of them. You certainly must have noticed that, eh? Why are you laughing?

CLEM. Comical — is no word for it! If some one had prophesied to me that I was going to marry a regular frequenter of the Café Maxmillian — I fancied the two young painters most. They'd have made an incomparable vaudeville team. Do you know, they resembled each other so much and owned everything they possessed in common — and, if I'm not mistaken, the Russian on the ladder along with the rest.

MARG. I didn't bother myself with such things.

CLEM. And, then, both must have been Jews?

MARG. Why so?

CLEM. Oh, simply because they always jested in such a way. And their enunciation.

MARG. You may spare your anti-Semitic remarks.

CLEM. Now, sweetheart, don't be touchy. I know that your blood is not untainted, and I have nothing whatever against the Jews. I once had a tutor in Greek who was a Jew. Upon my word! He was a capital fellow. One meets all sorts and conditions of people. I don't in the least regret having made the acquaintance of your associates in Munich. It's all the weave of our life experience.

But I can't help thinking that I must have appeared to you like a hero come to rescue you in the nick of time.

MARG. Yes, so you did. My Clem! Clem! [*Embraces him.*]

CLEM. What are you laughing at?

MARG. Something's just occurred to me.

CLEM. What?

MARG. "Abandoned on thy breast and —"

CLEM. [*vexed*]. Please! Must you always shatter my illusions?

MARG. Tell me truly, Clem, wouldn't you be proud if your fiancée, your wife, were to become a great, a famous writer?

CLEM. I have already told you. I am rooted in my decision. And I promise you that if you begin scribbling or publishing poems in which you paint your passion for me, and sing to the world the progress of our love — it's all up with our wedding, and off I go.

MARG. You threaten — you, who have had a dozen well-known affairs.

CLEM. My dear, well-known or not, I didn't tell anybody. I didn't bring out a book whenever a woman abandoned herself on my breast, so that any Tom, Dick or Harry could buy it for a gulden and a half. There's the rub. I know there are people who thrive by it, but, as for me, I find it extremely coarse. It's more degrading to me than if you were to pose as a Greek goddess in flesh-colored tights at Ronacher's. A Greek statue like that doesn't say "Mew." But a writer who makes copy of everything goes beyond the merely humorous.

MARG. [*nervously*]. Dearest, you forget that the poet does not always tell the truth.

CLEM. And suppose he only vaporizes. Does that make it any better?

MARG. It isn't called vaporizing; it's "*distillation.*"

CLEM. What sort of an expression is that?

MARG. We disclose things we never experience, things we dreamed — plainly invented.

CLEM. Don't say "we" any more, Margaret. Thank goodness, that is past.

MARG. Who knows?

CLEM. What?

MARG. [*tenderly*]. Clement, I must tell you all.

CLEM. What is it?

MARG. It is not past; I haven't given up my writing.

CLEM. Why?

MARG. I'm still going on with my writing, or, rather, I've finished writing another book. Yes, the impulse is stronger than most people realize. I really believe I should have gone to pieces if it hadn't been for my writing.

CLEM. What have you written now?

MARG. A novel. The weight was too heavy to be borne. It might have dragged me down — down. Until to-day, I tried to hide it from you, but it had to come out at last. Künigel is immensely taken with it.

CLEM. Who's Künigel?

MARG. My publisher.

CLEM. Then it's been read already.

MARG. Yes, and lots more will read it. Clement, you will have cause to be proud, believe me.

CLEM. You're mistaken, my dear. I think — but, tell me, what's it about?

MARG. I can't tell you right off. The novel contains the greatest part, so to speak, and all that can be said of the greatest part.

CLEM. My compliments!

MARG. That's why I'm going to promise you never to pick up a pen any more. I don't need to.

CLEM. Margaret, do you love me?

MARG. What a question! You and you only. Though I have seen a great deal, though I have gadded about a great deal, I have experienced comparatively little. I have waited all my life for your coming.

CLEM. Well, let me have the book.

MARG. Why — why? What do you mean?

CLEM. I grant you, there was some excuse in your having written it; but it doesn't follow that it's got to be read. Let me have it, and we'll throw it into the fire.

MARG. Clem!

CLEM. I make that request. I have a right to make it.

MARG. Impossible! It simply —

CLEM. Why? If I wish it; if I tell you our whole future depends on it. Do you understand? Is it still impossible?

MARG. But, Clement, the novel has already been printed.

CLEM. What! Printed?

MARG. Yes. In a few days it will be on sale on all the book-stalls.

CLEM. Margaret, you did all that without a word to me—?

MARG. I couldn't do otherwise. When once you see it, you will forgive me. More than that, you will be proud.

CLEM. My dear, this has progressed beyond a joke.

MARG. Clement!

CLEM. Adieu, Margaret.

MARG. Clement, what does this mean? You are leaving?

CLEM. As you see.

MARG. When are you coming back again?

CLEM. I can't say just now. Adieu.

MARG. Clement! [*Tries to hold him back.*]

CLEM. Please. [*Goes out.*]

MARG. [*alone*]. Clement! What does this mean? He's left me for good. What shall I do? Clement! Is everything between us at an end? No. It can't be. Clement! I'll go after him. [*She looks for her hat. The doorbell rings.*] Ah, he's coming back. He only wanted to frighten me. Oh, my Clement! [*Goes to the door. Gilbert enters.*]

GIL. [*to the maid*]. I told you so. Madame's at home. How do you do, Margaret?

MARG. [*astonished*]. You?

GIL. It's I—I. Amandus Gilbert.

MARG. I'm so surprised.

GIL. So I see. There's no cause for it. I merely thought I'd stop over. I'm on my way to Italy. I came to offer you my latest book for auld lang syne. [*Hands her the book. As she does not take it, he places it on the table.*]

MARG. It's very good of you. Thanks!

GIL. You have a certain proprietorship in that book. So you are living here?

MARG. Yes, but—

GIL. Opposite the stadium, I see. As far as furnished rooms go, it's passable enough. But these family portraits on the walls would drive me crazy.

MARG. My housekeeper's the widow of a general.

GIL. Oh, you needn't apologize.

MARG. Apologize! Really, the idea never occurred to me.

GIL. It's wonderful to hark back to it now.

MARG. To what?

GIL. Why shouldn't I say it? To the small room in Steinsdorf street, with its balcony abutting over the Isar. Do you remember, Margaret?

MARG. Suppose we drop the familiar.

GIL. As you please—as you please. [*Pause, then suddenly.*] You acted shamefully, Margaret.

MARG. What do you mean?

GIL. Would you much rather that I beat around the bush? I can find no other word, to my regret. And it was so uncalled for, too. Straightforwardness would have done just as nicely. It was quite unnecessary to run away from Munich under cover of a foggy night.

MARG. It wasn't night and it wasn't foggy. I left in the morning on the eight-thirty train, in open daylight.

GIL. At all events, you might have said good-by to me before leaving, eh? [*Sits.*]

MARG. I expect the Baron back any minute.

GIL. What difference does that make? Of course, you didn't tell him that you lay in my arms once and worshiped me. I'm just an old acquaintance from Munich. And there's no harm in an old acquaintance calling to see you?

MARG. Anybody but you.

GIL. Why? Why do you persist in misunderstanding me? I assure you, I come *only* as an old acquaintance. Everything else is dead and buried, long dead and buried. Here. See for yourself. [*Indicates the book.*]

MARG. What's that?

GIL. My latest novel.

MARG. Have you taken to writing novels?

GIL. Certainly.

MARG. Since when have you learned the trick?

GIL. What do you mean?

MARG. Heavens, can't I remember? Thumb-nail sketches were your specialty, observation of daily events.

GIL. [*excitedly*]. My specialty? My specialty is life itself. I write what suits me. I do not allow myself to be circum-

scribed. I don't see who's to prevent my writing a novel.

MARG. But the opinion of an authority was —

GIL. Pray, who's an authority?

MARG. I call to mind, for instance, an article by Neumann in the "Algemeine"—

GIL. [*angrily*]. Neumann's a blamed idiot! I boxed his ears for him once.

MARG. You —

GIL. In effigy — But you were quite as much wrought up about the business as I at that time. We were perfectly agreed that Neumann was a blamed idiot. "How can such a numbskull dare"— these were your very words —"to set bounds to your genius? How can he dare to stifle your next work still, so to speak, in the womb?" You said that! And to-day you quote that literary hawker.

MARG. Please do not shout. My housekeeper —

GIL. I don't propose to bother myself about the widows of defunct generals when every nerve in my body is a-tingle.

MARG. What did I say? I can't account for your touchiness.

GIL. Touchiness! You call me touchy? You! Who used to be seized with a violent fit of trembling every time some insignificant booby or some trumpery sheet happened to utter an unfavorable word of criticism.

MARG. I don't remember one word of unfavorable criticism against me.

GIL. H'm! I dare say you may be right. Critics are always chivalrous toward beautiful women.

MARG. Chivalrous? Do you think my poems were praised out of chivalry? What about your own estimate —

GIL. Mine? I'm not going to retract so much as one little word. I simply want to remind you that you composed your sheaf of lovely poems while we were living together.

MARG. And you actually consider yourself worthy of them?

GIL. Would you have written them if it weren't for me? They are addressed to me.

MARG. Never!

GIL. What! Do you mean to deny that they are addressed to me? This is monstrous!

MARG. No. They are not addressed to you.

GIL. I am dumbfounded. I shall remind you of the situations in which some of your loveliest verses had birth?

MARG. They were inscribed to an Ideal — [*Gilbert points to himself*] — whose representative on earth you happened to be.

GIL. Ha! This is precious. Where did you get that? Do you know what the French would say in a case like that? "C'est de la littérature!"

MARG. [*mimicking him*]. Ce n'est pas de la littérature! Now, that's the truth, the honest truth! Or do you really fancy that by the "slim boy" I meant you? Or that the curls I hymned belonged to you? At that time you were fat and your hair was never curly. [*Runs her fingers through his hair. Gilbert seizes the opportunity to capture her hand and kiss it.*] What an idea!

GIL. At that time you pictured it so; or, at all events, that is what you called it. To be sure, a poet is forced to take every sort of license for the sake of the rhythm. Didn't I once apostrophise you in a sonnet as "my canny lass"? In point of fact, you were neither — no, I don't want to be unfair — you were canny, shamefully canny, perversely canny. And it suited you perfectly. Well, I suppose I really oughtn't to wonder at you. You were at all times a snob. And, by Jove! you've attained your end. You have decoyed your blue-blooded boy with his well-manicured hands and his unmanicured brain, your matchless horseman, fencer, marksman, tennis player, heart-trifler — Marlitt could not have invented him more revolting than he actually is. Yes, what more can you wish? Whether he will satisfy you — who are acquainted with something nobler — is, of course, another question. I can only say that, in my view, you are degenerate in love.

MARG. That must have struck you on the train.

GIL. Not at all. It struck me this very moment.

MARG. Make a note of it then; it's an apt phrase.

GIL. I've another quite as apt. Formerly you were a woman; now you're a "sweet thing." Yes, that's it. What at-

tracted you to a man of that type? Passion — frank and filthy passion —

MARG. Stop! You have a motive —

GIL. My dear, I still lay claim to the possession of a soul.

MARG. Except now and then.

GIL. Please don't try to disparage our former relations. It's no use. They are the noblest experiences you've ever had.

MARG. Heavens, when I think that I endured this twaddle for one whole year I —

GIL. Endure? You were intoxicated with joy. Don't try to be ungrateful. I'm not. Admitting that you behaved never so execrably at the end, yet I can't bring myself to look upon it with bitterness. It had to come just that way.

MARG. Indeed!

GIL. I owe you an explanation. This: at the moment when you were beginning to drift away from me, when homesickness for the stables gripped you — *la nostalgie de l'écurie* — at that moment I was done with you.

MARG. Impossible.

GIL. You failed to notice the least sign in your characteristic way. I was done with you. To be plain, I didn't need you any longer. What you had to give you gave me. Your uses were fulfilled. In the depths of your soul you knew, unconsciously you knew —

MARG. Please don't get so hot.

GIL. [*unruffled*]. That our day was over. Our relations had served their purpose. I don't regret having loved you.

MARG. I do!

GIL. Capital! This measly outburst must reveal to a person of any insight just one thing: the essential line of difference between the artist and the dilettante. To you, Margaret, our *liaison* means nothing more than the memory of a few abandoned nights, a few heart-to-heart talks in the winding ways of the English gardens. But *I* have made it over into a work of art.

MARG. So have I!

GIL. Eh? What do you mean?

MARG. I have done what you have done. I, too, have written a novel in which our relations are depicted. I, too, have embalmed our love — or what we thought was our love — for all time.

GIL. If I were you, I wouldn't talk of "for all time" before the appearance of the second edition.

MARG. Your writing a novel and my writing a novel are two different things.

GIL. Maybe.

MARG. You are a free man. You don't have to steal your hours devoted to artistic labor. And your future doesn't depend on the throw.

GIL. And you?

MARG. That's what I've done. Only a half hour ago Clement left me because I confessed to him that I had written a novel.

GIL. Left you — for good?

MARG. I don't know. But it isn't unlikely. He went away in a fit of anger. What he'll decide to do I can't say.

GIL. So he objects to your writing, does he? He can't bear to see his mistress put her intelligence to some use. Capital! And he represents the blood of the country! H'm! And you, you're not ashamed to give yourself up to the arms of an idiot of this sort, whom you once —

MARG. Don't you speak of him like that. You don't know him.

GIL. Ah!

MARG. You don't know why he objects to my writing. Purely out of love. He feels that if I go on I will be living in a world entirely apart from him. He blushes at the thought that I should make copy of the most sacred feelings of my soul for unknown people to read. It is his wish that I belong to him only, and that is why he dashed out — no, not dashed out — for Clement doesn't belong to the class that dashes out.

GIL. Your observation is well taken. In any case, he went away. We will not undertake to discuss the *tempo* of his going forth. And he went away because he could not bear to see you surrender yourself to the creative impulse.

MARG. Ah, if he could only understand that! But, of course, that can never be! I could be the best, the faithfulest, the noblest woman in the world if the right man only existed.

GIL. At all events, you admit he is not the right man.

MARG. I never said that!

GIL. But you ought to realize that he's fettering you, undoing you utterly,

seeking through egotism, to destroy your inalienable self. Look back for a moment at the Margaret you were; at the freedom that was yours while you loved me. Think of the younger set who gathered about me and who belonged no whit less to you? Do you never long for those days? Do you never call to mind the small room with its balcony — Beneath us plunged the Isar — [*He seizes her hand and presses her near.*]

MARG. Ah!

GIL. All's not beyond recall. It need not be the Isar, need it? I have something to propose to you, Margaret. Tell him, when he returns, that you still have some important matters to arrange at Munich, and spend the time with me. Margaret, you are so lovely! We shall be happy again as then. Do you remember [*very near her*] "Abandoned on thy breast and —"

MARG. [*retreating brusquely from him*]. Go, go away. No, no. Please go away. I don't love you any more.

GIL. Oh, h'm — indeed! Oh, in that case I beg your pardon. [*Pause.*] Adieu, Margaret.

MARG. Adieu.

GIL. Won't you present me with a copy of your novel as a parting gift, as I have done?

MARG. It hasn't come out yet. It won't be on sale before next week.

GIL. Pardon my inquisitiveness, what kind of a story is it?

MARG. The story of my life. So veiled, to be sure, that I am in no danger of being recognized.

GIL. I see. How did you manage to do it?

MARG. Very simple. For one thing, the heroine is not a writer but a painter.

GIL. Very clever.

MARG. Her first husband is not a cotton manufacturer, but a big financier, and, of course, it wouldn't do to deceive him with a tenor —

GIL. Ha! Ha!

MARG. What strikes you so funny?

GIL. So you deceived him with a tenor? I didn't know that.

MARG. Whoever said so?

GIL. Why, you yourself, just now.

MAGR. How so? I say the heroine of the book deceives her husband with a baritone.

GIL. Bass would have been more sublime, mezzo-soprano more piquant.

MARG. Then she doesn't go to Munich, but to Dresden; and there, has an affair with a sculptor.

GIL. That's me — veiled.

MARG. Very much veiled, I rather fear. The sculptor, as it happens, is young, handsome and a genius. In spite of that she leaves him.

GIL. For —

MARG. Guess?

GIL. A jockey, I fancy.

MARG. Wretch!

GIL. A count, a prince of the empire?

MARG. Wrong. An archduke.

GIL. I must say you have spared no costs.

MARG. Yes, an archduke, who gave up the court for her sake, married her and emigrated with her to the Canary Islands.

GIL. The Canary Islands! Splendid! And then —

MARG. With the disembarkation —

GIL. In Canaryland.

MARG. The story ends.

GIL. Good. I'm very much interested, especially in the veiling.

MARG. You yourself wouldn't recognize me were it not for —

GIL. What?

MARG. The third chapter from the end, where our correspondence is published entire.

GIL. What?

MARG. Yes, all the letters you sent me and those I sent you are included in the novel.

GIL. I see, but may I ask where you got those you sent me? I thought I had them.

MARG. I know. But, you see, I had the habit of always making a rough draft.

GIL. A rough draft?

MARG. Yes

GIL. A rough draft? Those letters which seemed to have been dashed off in such tremendous haste. "Just one word, dearest, before I go to bed. My eyelids are heavy —" and when your eyelids were closed you wrote the whole thing over again.

MARG. Are you piqued about it?

GIL. I might have expected as much. I ought to be glad, however, that they weren't bought from a professional love-

letter writer. Oh, how everything begins to crumble! The whole past is nothing but a heap of ruins. She made a rough draft of her letters!

MARG. Be content. Maybe my letters will be all that will remain immortal of your memory.

GIL. And along with them will remain the fatal story.

MARG. Why?

GIL. [*indicating his book*]. Because they also appear in my book.

MARG. In *where?*

GIL. In my novel.

MARG. What?

GIL. Our letters — yours and mine.

MARG. Where did you get your own? I've got them in my possession. Ah, so you, too, made a rough draft?

GIL. Nothing of the kind! I only copied them before mailing. I didn't want to lose them. There are some in my book which you didn't even get. They were, in my opinion, too beautiful for you. You wouldn't have understood them at all.

MARG. Merciful heavens! If this is so — [*turning the leaves of Gilbert's book*]. Yes, yes, it is so. Why, it's just like telling the world that we two — Merciful heavens! [*Feverishly turning the leaves.*] Is the letter you sent me the morning after the first night also —

GIL. Surely. That was brilliant.

MARG. This is horrible. Why, this is going to create a European sensation. And Clement — My God; I'm beginning to hope that he will not come back. I am ruined! And you along with me. Wherever you are, he'll be sure to find you and blow your brains out like a mad dog.

GIL. [*pocketing his book*]. Insipid comparison!

MARG. How did you hit upon such an insane idea? To publish the correspondence of a woman whom, in all sincerity, you professed to have loved! Oh, you're no gentleman.

GIL. Quite charming. Haven't you done the same?

MARG. I'm a woman.

GIL. Do you take refuge in that now?

MARG. Oh, it's true. I have nothing to reproach you with. We were made for one another. Yes, Clement was right. We're worse than those women who appear in flesh-colored tights. Our most sacred feelings, our pangs — everything — we make copy of everything. Pfui! Pfui! It's sickening. We two belong to one another. Clement would only be doing what is right if he drove me away. [*Suddenly.*] Come, Amandus.

GIL. What is it?

MARG. I accept your proposal.

GIL. What proposal?

MARG. I'm going to cut it with you. [*Looks for her hat and cloak.*]

GIL. Eh? What do you mean?

MARG. [*very much excited; puts her hat on tightly*]. Everything can be as it was. You've said it. It needn't be the Isar — well, I'm ready.

GIL. Sheer madness! Cut it — what's the meaning of this? Didn't you yourself say a minute ago that he'd find me anywhere. If you're with me, he'll have no difficulty in finding you, too. Wouldn't it be better if each —

MARG. Wretch! Now you want to leave me in a lurch! Why, only a few minutes ago you were on your knees before me. Have you no conscience?

GIL. What's the use? I am a sick, nervous man, suffering from hypochondria. [*Margaret at the window utters a cry.*]

GIL. What's up? What will the general's widow think?

MARG. It's he. He's coming back.

GIL. Well, then —

MARG. What? You intend to go?

GIL. I didn't come here to pay the baron a visit.

MARG. He'll encounter you on the stairs. That would be worse. Stay. I refuse to be sacrificed alone.

GIL. Now, don't lose your senses. Why do you tremble like that? It's quite absurd to believe that he's already gone through both novels. Calm yourself. Remove your hat. Off with your cloak. [*Assists her.*] If he catches you in this frame of mind he can't help but suspect.

MARG. It's all the same to me. Better now than later. I can't bear waiting and waiting for the horrible event. I'm going to tell him everything right away.

GIL. Everything?

MARG. Yes. And while you are still here. If I make a clean breast of everything now maybe he'll forgive me.

GIL. And me — what about me? I have a higher mission in the world, I think, than to suffer myself to be shot down like a mad dog by a jealous baron. [*The bell rings.*]

MARG. It's he! It's he.

GIL. Understand, you're not to breathe a word.

MARG. I've made up my mind.

GIL. Indeed, have a care. For, if you do, I shall sell my hide at a good price. I shall hurl such naked truths at him that he'll swear no baron heard the like of them.

CLEM. [*entering, somewhat surprised, but quite cool and courteous*]. Oh, Mr. Gilbert! Am I right?

GIL. The very same, Baron. I'm traveling south, and I couldn't repress the desire to pay my respects to madame.

CLEM. Ah, indeed. [*Pause.*] Pardon me, it seems I've interrupted your conversation. Pray, don't let me disturb you.

GIL. What were we talking about just now?

CLEM. Perhaps I can assist your memory. In Munich, if I recall correctly, you always talked about your books.

GIL. Quite so. As a matter of fact, I was speaking about my new novel.

CLEM. Pray, continue. Nowadays, I find that I, too, can talk literature. Eh, Margaret? Is it naturalistic? Symbolic? Autobiographical? Or — let me see — is it distilled?

GIL. Oh, in a certain sense we all write about our life-experiences.

CLEM. H'm. That's good to know.

GIL. Yes, if you're painting the character of Nero, in my opinion it's absolutely necessary that you should have set fire to Rome —

CLEM. Naturally.

GIL. From what source should a writer derive his inspiration if not from himself? Where should he go for his models if not to the life which is nearest to him? [*Margaret becomes more and more uneasy.*]

CLEM. Isn't it a pity, though, that the models are so rarely consulted? But I must say, if I were a woman, I'd think twice before I'd let such people know anything — [*Sharply.*] In decent society, sir, that's the same as compromising a woman!

GIL. I don't know whether I belong to decent society or not, but, in my humble opinion, it's the same as ennobling a woman.

CLEM. Indeed.

GIL. The essential thing is, does it really hit the mark! In a higher sense, what does it matter if the public does know that a woman was happy in this bed or that?

CLEM. Mr. Gilbert, allow me to remind you that you are speaking in the presence of a lady.

GIL. I'm speaking in the presence of a comrade, Baron, who, perhaps, shares my views in these matters.

CLEM. Oh!

MARG. Clement! [*Throws herself at his feet.*] Clement.

CLEM [*staggered*]. But — Margaret.

MARG. Your forgiveness, Clement!

CLEM. But, Margaret. [*To Gilbert.*] It's very painful to me, Mr. Gilbert. Now, get up, Margaret. Get up, everything's all right; everything's arranged. Yes, yes. You have but to call up Künigel. I have already arranged everything with him. We are going to put it out for sale. Is that suitable to you?

GIL. What are you going to put out for sale, if I may be so bold as to ask? The novel madame has written?

CLEM. Ah, so you know already. At all events, Mr. Gilbert, it seems that your *camaraderie* is not required any further.

GIL. Yes. There's really nothing left for me but to beg to be excused. I'm sorry.

CLEM. I very much regret, Mr. Gilbert, that you had to witness a scene which might almost be called domestic.

GIL. Oh, I do not wish to intrude any further.

GIL. Madame — Baron, may I offer you a copy of my book as a token that all ill-feeling between us has vanished? As a feeble sign of my sympathy, Baron?

CLEM. You're very good, Mr. Gilbert. I must, however, tell you that this is going to be the last, or the one before the last, that I ever intend to read.

GIL. The one before the last?

CLEM. Yes.

MARG. And what's the last going to be?

CLEM. Yours, my love. [*Draws an advanced copy from his pocket.*] I

wheedled an advance copy from Künigel to bring to you, or, rather, to both of us. [*Margaret and Gilbert exchange scared glances.*]

MARG. How good of you! [*Taking the book.*] Yes, it's mine.

CLEM. We will read it together.

MARG. No, Clement, no. I cannot accept so much kindness. [*She throws the book into the fireplace.*] I don't want to hear of this sort of thing any more.

GIL. [*very joyful*]. But, dear madame —

CLEM. [*going toward the fireplace*]. Margaret, what have you done?

MARG. [*in front of the fireplace, throwing her arms about Clement*]. Now, do you believe that I love you!

GIL. [*most gleeful*]. It appears that I'm entirely *de trop* here. Dear Madame — Baron — [*To himself.*] Pity, though, I can't stay for the last chapter. [*Goes out.*]

[*Curtain.*]

THE INTRUDER

A Play

By Maurice Maeterlinck

CHARACTERS

THE GRANDFATHER [*blind*].
THE FATHER.
THE THREE DAUGHTERS.
THE UNCLE.
THE SERVANT.

The present translation of THE INTRUDER is the anonymous version published by Mr. Heinemann in 1892, the editor having, however, made some slight alterations in order to bring it into conformity with the current French text. The particular edition used for this purpose was the 1911 (twenty-third) reprint of Vol. I of M. Maeterlinck's "Théâtre." A. L. G.

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THE INTRUDER

A Play

By Maurice Maeterlinck

[*A sombre room in an old Château. A door on the right, a door on the left, and a small concealed door in a corner. At the back, stained-glass windows, in which green is the dominant color, and a glass door giving on to a terrace. A big Dutch clock in one corner. A lighted lamp.*]

The Three Daughters. Come here, grandfather. Sit down under the lamp.

The Grandfather. There does not seem to me to be much light here.

The Father. Shall we go out on the terrace, or stay in this room?

The Uncle. Would it not be better to stay here? It has rained the whole week, and the nights are damp and cold.

The Eldest Daughter. But the stars are shining.

The Uncle. Oh the stars — that's nothing.

The Grandfather. We had better stay here. One never knows what may happen.

The Father. There is no longer any cause for anxiety. The danger is over, and she is saved . . .

The Grandfather. I believe she is not doing so well . . .

The Father. Why do you say that?

The Grandfather. I have heard her voice.

The Father. But since the doctors assure us we may be easy . . .

The Uncle. You know quite well that your father-in-law likes to alarm us needlessly.

The Grandfather. I don't see things as you do.

The Uncle. You ought to rely on us, then, who can see. She looked very well this afternoon. She is sleeping quietly now; and we are not going to mar, needlessly, the first pleasant evening that chance has put in our way. . . . It seems to me we have a perfect right to peace, and even to laugh a little, this evening, without fear.

The Father. That's true; this is the first time I have felt at home with my family since this terrible confinement.

The Uncle. When once illness has come into a house, it is as though a stranger had forced himself into the family circle.

The Father. And then you understand, too, that you can count on no one outside the family.

The Uncle. You are quite right.

The Grandfather. Why couldn't I see my poor daughter to-day?

The Uncle. You know quite well — the doctor forbade it.

The Grandfather. I do not know what to think . . .

The Uncle. It is useless to worry.

The Grandfather [*pointing to the door on the left*]. She cannot hear us?

The Father. We will not talk too loud; besides, the door is very thick, and the Sister of Mercy is with her, and she is sure to warn us if we are making too much noise.

The Grandfather [*pointing to the door on the right*]. He cannot hear us?

The Father. No, no.

The Grandfather. He is asleep?

The Father. I suppose so.

The Grandfather. Some one had better go and see.

The Uncle. The little one would cause *me* more anxiety than your wife. It is now several weeks since he was born, and he has scarcely stirred. He has not cried once all the time! He is like a wax doll.

The Grandfather. I think he will be deaf — dumb too, perhaps — the usual result of a marriage between cousins . . . [*A reproving silence.*]

THE FATHER. I could almost wish him ill for the suffering he has caused his mother.

THE UNCLE. Do be reasonable; it is not the poor little thing's fault. He is quite alone in the room?

THE FATHER. Yes; the doctor does not wish him to stay in his mother's room any longer.

THE UNCLE. But the nurse is with him?

THE FATHER. No; she has gone to rest a little; she has well deserved it these last few days. Ursula, just go and see if he is asleep.

THE ELDEST DAUGHTER. Yes, father. [*The Three Sisters get up, and go into the room on the right, hand in hand.*]

THE FATHER. When will your sister come?

THE UNCLE. I think she will come about nine.

THE FATHER. It is past nine. I hope she will come this evening, my wife is so anxious to see her.

THE UNCLE. She is sure to come. This will be the first time she has been here?

THE FATHER. She has never been in the house.

THE UNCLE. It is very difficult for her to leave her convent.

THE FATHER. Will she be alone?

THE UNCLE. I expect one of the nuns will come with her. They are not allowed to go out alone.

THE FATHER. But she is the Superior.

THE UNCLE. The rule is the same for all.

THE GRANDFATHER. Do you not feel anxious?

THE UNCLE. Why should we feel anxious? What's the good of harping on that? There is nothing more to fear.

THE GRANDFATHER. Your sister is older than you?

THE UNCLE. She is the eldest.

THE GRANDFATHER. I do not know what ails me; I feel uneasy. I wish your sister were here.

THE UNCLE. She will come; she promised to.

THE GRANDFATHER. Ah, if this evening were only over!

[*The three daughters come in again.*]

THE FATHER. He is asleep?

THE ELDEST DAUGHTER. Yes, father; he is sleeping soundly.

THE UNCLE. What shall we do while we are waiting?

THE GRANDFATHER. Waiting for what?

THE UNCLE. Waiting for our sister.

THE FATHER. You see nothing coming, Ursula?

THE ELDEST DAUGHTER [*at the window*]. Nothing, father.

THE FATHER. Not in the avenue? Can you see the avenue?

THE DAUGHTER. Yes, father; it is moonlight, and I can see the avenue as far as the cypress wood.

THE GRANDFATHER. And you do not see any one?

THE DAUGHTER. No one, grandfather.

THE UNCLE. What sort of a night is it?

THE DAUGHTER. Very fine. Do you hear the nightingales?

THE UNCLE. Yes, yes.

THE DAUGHTER. A little wind is rising in the avenue.

THE GRANDFATHER. A little wind in the avenue?

THE DAUGHTER. Yes; the trees are trembling a little.

THE UNCLE. I am surprised that my sister is not here yet.

THE GRANDFATHER. I cannot hear the nightingales any longer.

THE DAUGHTER. I think some one has come into the garden, grandfather.

THE GRANDFATHER. Who is it?

THE DAUGHTER. I do not know; I can see no one.

THE UNCLE. Because there is no one there.

THE DAUGHTER. There must be some one in the garden; the nightingales have suddenly ceased singing.

THE GRANDFATHER. But I do not hear any one coming.

THE DAUGHTER. Some one must be passing by the pond, because the swans are ruffled.

ANOTHER DAUGHTER. All the fishes in the pond are diving suddenly.

THE FATHER. You cannot see any one.

THE DAUGHTER. No one, father.

THE FATHER. But the pond lies in the moonlight . . .

THE DAUGHTER. Yes; I can see that the swans are ruffled.

THE UNCLE. I am sure it is my sister who is scaring them. She must have come in by the little gate.

THE FATHER. I cannot understand why the dogs do not bark.

THE DAUGHTER. I can see the watch-dog right at the back of his kennel. The swans are crossing to the other bank! . . .

THE UNCLE. They are afraid of my sister. I will go and see. [*He calls.*] Sister! sister! Is that you? . . . There is no one there.

THE DAUGHTER. I am sure that some one has come into the garden. You will see.

THE UNCLE. But she would answer me!

THE GRANDFATHER. Are not the nightingales beginning to sing again, Ursula?

THE DAUGHTER. I cannot hear one anywhere.

THE GRANDFATHER. But there is no noise.

THE FATHER. There is a silence of the grave.

THE GRANDFATHER. It must be a stranger that is frightening them, for if it were one of the family they would not be silent.

THE UNCLE. How much longer are you going to discuss these nightingales?

THE GRANDFATHER. Are all the windows open, Ursula?

THE DAUGHTER. The glass door is open, grandfather.

THE GRANDFATHER. It seems to me that the cold is penetrating into the room.

THE DAUGHTER. There is a little wind in the garden, grandfather, and the rose-leaves are falling.

THE FATHER. Well, shut the door. It is late.

THE DAUGHTER. Yes, father . . . I cannot shut the door.

THE TWO OTHER DAUGHTERS. We cannot shut the door.

THE GRANDFATHER. Why, what is the matter with the door, my children?

THE UNCLE. You need not say that in such an extraordinary voice. I will go and help them.

THE ELDEST DAUGHTER. We cannot manage to shut it quite.

THE UNCLE. It is because of the damp. Let us all push together. There must be something in the way.

THE FATHER. The carpenter will set it right to-morrow.

THE GRANDFATHER. Is the carpenter coming to-morrow.

THE DAUGHTER. Yes, grandfather; he is coming to do some work in the cellar.

THE GRANDFATHER. He will make a noise in the house.

THE DAUGHTER. I will tell him to work quietly.

[*Suddenly the sound of a scythe being sharpened is heard outside.*]

THE GRANDFATHER [*with a shudder*]. Oh!

THE UNCLE. What is that?

THE DAUGHTER. I don't quite know; I think it is the gardener. I cannot quite see; he is in the shadow of the house.

THE FATHER. It is the gardener going to mow.

THE UNCLE. He mows by night?

THE FATHER. Is not to-morrow Sunday? — Yes.—I noticed that the grass was very long round the house.

THE GRANDFATHER. It seems to me that his scythe makes as much noise . . .

THE DAUGHTER. He is mowing near the house.

THE GRANDFATHER. Can you see him, Ursula?

THE DAUGHTER. No, grandfather. He is standing in the dark.

THE GRANDFATHER. I am afraid he will wake my daughter.

THE UNCLE. We can scarcely hear him.

THE GRANDFATHER. Is sounds as if he were mowing inside the house.

THE UNCLE. The invalid will not hear it; there is no danger.

THE FATHER. It seems to me that the lamp is not burning well this evening.

THE UNCLE. It wants filling.

THE FATHER. I saw it filled this morning. It has burnt badly since the window was shut.

THE UNCLE. I fancy the chimney is dirty.

THE FATHER. It will burn better presently.

THE DAUGHTER. Grandfather is asleep. He has not slept for three nights.

THE FATHER. He has been so much worried.

THE UNCLE. He always worries too much. At times he will not listen to reason.

THE FATHER. It is quite excusable at his age.

THE UNCLE. God knows what we shall be like at his age!

THE FATHER. He is nearly eighty.

THE UNCLE. Then he has a right to be strange.

THE FATHER. He is like all blind people.

THE UNCLE. They think too much.

THE FATHER. They have too much time to spare.

THE UNCLE. They have nothing else to do.

THE FATHER. And, besides, they have no distractions.

THE UNCLE. That must be terrible.

THE FATHER. Apparently one gets used to it.

THE UNCLE. I cannot imagine it.

THE FATHER. They are certainly to be pitied.

THE UNCLE. Not to know where one is, not to know where one has come from, not to know whither one is going, not to be able to distinguish midday from midnight, or summer from winter — and always darkness, darkness! I would rather not live. Is it absolutely incurable?

THE FATHER. Apparently so.

THE UNCLE. But he is not absolutely blind?

THE FATHER. He can perceive a strong light.

THE UNCLE. Let us take care of our poor eyes.

THE FATHER. He often has strange ideas.

THE UNCLE. At times he is not at all amusing.

THE FATHER. He says absolutely everything he thinks.

THE UNCLE. But he was not always like this?

THE FATHER. No; once he was as rational as we are; he never said anything extraordinary. I am afraid Ursula encourages him a little too much; she answers all his questions . . .

THE UNCLE. It would be better not to answer them. It's a mistaken kindness to him.

[*Ten o'clock strikes.*]

THE GRANDFATHER [*waking up*]. Am I facing the glass door?

THE DAUGHTER. You have had a nice sleep, grandfather?

THE GRANDFATHER. Am I facing the glass door?

THE DAUGHTER. Yes, grandfather.

THE GRANDFATHER. There is nobody at the glass door?

THE DAUGHTER. No, grandfather; I do not see any one.

THE GRANDFATHER. I thought some one was waiting. No one has come?

THE DAUGHTER. No one, grandfather.

THE GRANDFATHER [*to the Uncle and Father*]. And your sister has not come?

THE UNCLE. It is too late; she will not come now. It is not nice of her.

THE FATHER. I'm beginning to be anxious about her. [*A noise, as of some one coming into the house.*]

THE UNCLE. She is here! Did you hear?

THE FATHER. Yes; some one has come in at the basement.

THE UNCLE. It must be our sister. I recognized her step.

THE GRANDFATHER. I heard slow footsteps.

THE FATHER. She came in very quietly.

THE UNCLE. She knows there is an invalid.

THE GRANDFATHER. I hear nothing now.

THE UNCLE. She will come up directly; they will tell her we are here.

THE FATHER. I am glad she has come.

THE UNCLE. I was sure she would come this evening.

THE GRANDFATHER. She is a very long time coming up.

THE UNCLE. It must be she.

THE FATHER. We are not expecting any other visitors.

THE GRANDFATHER. I cannot hear any noise in the basement.

THE FATHER. I will call the servant. We shall know how things stand. [*He pulls a bell-rope.*]

THE GRANDFATHER. I can hear a noise on the stairs already.

THE FATHER. It is the servant coming up.

THE GRANDFATHER. To me it sounds as if she were not alone.

THE FATHER. She is coming up slowly . . .

THE GRANDFATHER. I hear your sister's step!

THE FATHER. I can only hear the servant.

THE GRANDFATHER. It is your sister! It is your sister! [*There is a knock at the little door.*]

THE UNCLE. She is knocking at the door of the back stairs.

THE FATHER. I will go and open it myself. [*He opens the little door partly; the Servant remains outside in the opening.*] Where are you?

THE SERVANT. Here, sir.

THE GRANDFATHER. Your sister is at the door?

THE UNCLE. I can only see the servant.

THE FATHER. It is only the servant. [*To the Servant.*] Who was that, that came into the house?

THE SERVANT. Came into the house?

THE FATHER. Yes; some one came in just now?

THE SERVANT. No one came in, sir.

THE GRANDFATHER. Who is it sighing like that?

THE UNCLE. It is the servant; she is out of breath.

THE GRANDFATHER. Is she crying?

THE UNCLE. No; why should she be crying?

THE FATHER [*to the Servant*]. No one came in just now?

THE SERVANT. No, sir.

THE FATHER. But we heard some one open the door!

THE SERVANT. It was I shutting the door.

THE FATHER. It was open?

THE SERVANT. Yes, sir.

THE FATHER. Why was it open at this time of night?

THE SERVANT. I do not know, sir. I had shut it myself.

THE FATHER. Then who was it that opened it?

THE SERVANT. I do not know, sir. Some one must have gone out after me, sir . . .

THE FATHER. You must be careful.—Don't push the door; you know what a noise it makes!

THE SERVANT. But, sir, I am not touching the door.

THE FATHER. But you are. You are pushing as if you were trying to get into the room.

THE SERVANT. But, sir, I am three yards away from the door.

THE FATHER. Don't talk so loud . . .

THE GRANDFATHER. Are they putting out the light?

THE ELDEST DAUGHTER. No, grandfather.

THE GRANDFATHER. It seems to me it has grown pitch dark all at once.

THE FATHER [*to the Servant*]. You can go down again now; but do not make so much noise on the stairs.

THE SERVANT. I did not make any noise on the stairs.

THE FATHER. I tell you that you did make a noise. Go down quietly; you will wake your mistress. And if any one comes now, say that we are not at home.

THE UNCLE. Yes; say that we are not at home.

THE GRANDFATHER [*shuddering*]. You must not say that!

THE FATHER. . . . Except to my sister and the doctor.

THE UNCLE. When will the doctor come?

THE FATHER. He will not be able to come before midnight. [*He shuts the door. A clock is heard striking eleven.*]

THE GRANDFATHER. She has come in?

THE FATHER. Who?

THE GRANDFATHER. The servant.

THE FATHER. No, she has gone downstairs.

THE GRANDFATHER. I thought that she was sitting at the table.

THE UNCLE. The servant?

THE GRANDFATHER. Yes.

THE UNCLE. That would complete one's happiness!

THE GRANDFATHER. No one has come into the room?

THE FATHER. No; no one has come in.

THE GRANDFATHER. And your sister is not here?

THE UNCLE. Our sister has not come.

THE GRANDFATHER. You want to deceive me.

THE UNCLE. Deceive you?

THE GRANDFATHER. Ursula, tell me the truth, for the love of God!

THE ELDEST DAUGHTER. Grandfather! Grandfather! what is the matter with you?

THE GRANDFATHER. Something has happened! I am sure my daughter is worse! . . .

THE UNCLE. Are you dreaming?

THE GRANDFATHER. You do not want to tell me! . . . I can see quite well there is something . . .

THE UNCLE. In that case you can see better than we can.

THE GRANDFATHER. Ursula, tell me the truth!

THE DAUGHTER. But we have told you the truth, grandfather!

THE GRANDFATHER. You do not speak in your ordinary voice.

THE FATHER. That is because you frighten her.

THE GRANDFATHER. Your voice is changed, too.

THE FATHER. You are going mad! [*He and the Uncle make signs to each other to signify the Grandfather has lost his reason.*]

THE GRANDFATHER. I can hear quite well that you are afraid.

THE FATHER. But what should we be afraid of?

THE GRANDFATHER. Why do you want to deceive me?

THE UNCLE. Who is thinking of deceiving you?

THE GRANDFATHER. Why have you put out the light?

THE UNCLE. But the light has not been put out; there is as much light as there was before.

THE DAUGHTER. It seems to me that the lamp has gone down.

THE FATHER. I see as well now as ever.

THE GRANDFATHER. I have millstones on my eyes! Tell me, girls, what is going on here! Tell me, for the love of God, you who can see! I am here, all alone, in darkness without end! I do not know who seats himself beside me! I do not know what is happening a yard from me! . . . Why were you talking under your breath just now?

THE FATHER. No one was talking under his breath.

THE GRANDFATHER. You did talk in a low voice at the door.

THE FATHER. You heard all I said.

THE GRANDFATHER. You brought some one into the room! . . .

THE FATHER. But I tell you no one has come in!

THE GRANDFATHER. Is it your sister or a priest?— You should not try to deceive me.— Ursula, who was it that came in?

THE DAUGHTER. No one, grandfather.

THE GRANDFATHER. You must not try to deceive me; I know what I know.— How many of us are there here?

THE DAUGHTER. There are six of us round the table, grandfather.

THE GRANDFATHER. You are all round the table?

THE DAUGHTER. Yes, grandfather.

THE GRANDFATHER. You are there, Paul?

THE FATHER. Yes.

THE GRANDFATHER. You are there, Oliver?

THE UNCLE. Yes, of course I am here, in my usual place. That's not alarming, is it?

THE GRANDFATHER. You are there, Geneviève?

ONE OF THE DAUGHTERS. Yes, grandfather.

THE GRANDFATHER. You are there, Gertrude?

ANOTHER DAUGHTER. Yes, grandfather.

THE GRANDFATHER. You are here, Ursula?

THE ELDEST DAUGHTER. Yes, grandfather; next to you.

THE GRANDFATHER. And who is that sitting there?

THE DAUGHTER. Where do you mean, grandfather?— There is no one.

THE GRANDFATHER. There, there — in the midst of us!

THE DAUGHTER. But there is no one, grandfather!

THE FATHER. We tell you there is no one!

THE GRANDFATHER. But you cannot see — any of you!

THE UNCLE. Pshaw! You are joking.

THE GRANDFATHER. I do not feel inclined for joking, I can assure you.

THE UNCLE. Then believe those who can see.

THE GRANDFATHER [*undecidedly*]. I thought there was some one . . . I believe I shall not live long . . .

THE UNCLE. Why should we deceive you? What use would there be in that?

THE FATHER. It would be our duty to tell you the truth . . .

THE UNCLE. What would be the good of deceiving each other?

THE FATHER. You could not live in error long.

THE GRANDFATHER [*trying to rise*]. I should like to pierce this darkness! . . .

THE FATHER. Where do you want to go?

THE GRANDFATHER. Over there . . .

THE FATHER. Don't be so anxious.

THE UNCLE. You are strange this evening.

THE GRANDFATHER. It is all of you who seem to me to be strange!

THE FATHER. Do you want anything?

THE GRANDFATHER. I do not know what ails me.

THE ELDEST DAUGHTER. Grandfather! grandfather! What do you want, grandfather?

THE GRANDFATHER. Give me your little hands, my children.

THE THREE DAUGHTERS. Yes, grandfather.

THE GRANDFATHER. Why are you all three trembling, girls?

THE ELDEST DAUGHTER. We are scarcely trembling at all, grandfather.

THE GRANDFATHER. I fancy you are all three pale.

THE ELDEST DAUGHTER. It is late, grandfather, and we are tired.

THE FATHER. You must go to bed, and grandfather himself would do well to take a little rest.

THE GRANDFATHER. I could not sleep to-night!

THE UNCLE. We will wait for the doctor.

THE GRANDFATHER. Prepare for the truth.

THE UNCLE. But there is no truth!

THE GRANDFATHER. Then I do not know what there is!

THE UNCLE. I tell you there is nothing at all!

THE GRANDFATHER. I wish I could see my poor daughter!

THE FATHER. But you know quite well it is impossible; she must not be awakened unnecessarily.

THE UNCLE. You will see her to-morrow.

THE GRANDFATHER. There is no sound in her room.

THE UNCLE. I should be uneasy if I heard any sound.

THE GRANDFATHER. It is a very long time since I saw my daughter! . . . I took her hands yesterday evening, but I could not see her! . . . I do not know what has become of her . . . I do not know how she is . . . I do not know what her face is like now . . . She must have changed these weeks! . . . I felt the little bones of her cheeks under my hands . . . There is nothing but the darkness between her and me, and the rest of you! . . . I cannot go on living like this . . . this is not living . . . You sit there, all of you, looking with open eyes at my dead eyes, and not one of you has pity on me! . . . I do not know what ails me . . . No one tells me what ought to be told me . . . And everything is terrifying when one's dreams dwell upon it . . . But why are you not speaking?

THE UNCLE. What should be say, since you will not believe us?

THE GRANDFATHER. You are afraid of betraying yourselves!

THE FATHER. Come now, be rational!

THE GRANDFATHER. You have been hiding something from me for a long time! . . . Something has happened in the house . . . But I am beginning to understand now . . . You have been deceiving me too long! — You fancy that I shall never know anything? — There are moments when I am less blind than you, you know!. . . Do you think I have not heard you whispering — for days and days — as if you were in the house of some one who had been hanged — I dare not say what I know this evening . . . But I shall know the truth! . . . I shall wait for you to tell me the truth; but I have known it for a long time, in spite of you! — And now, I feel that you are all paler than the dead!

THE THREE DAUGHTERS. Grandfather! grandfather! What is the matter, grandfather?

THE GRANDFATHER. It is not you that I am speaking of, girls. No; it is not you that I am speaking of . . . I know

quite well you would tell me the truth — if they were not by! . . . And besides, I feel sure that they are deceiving you as well . . . You will see, children — you will see! . . . Do not I hear you all sobbing?

THE FATHER. Is my wife really so ill?

THE GRANDFATHER. It is no good trying to deceive me any longer; it is too late now, and I know the truth better than you! . . .

THE UNCLE. But *we* are not blind; we are not.

THE FATHER. Would you like to go into your daughter's room? This misunderstanding must be put an end to.— Would you?

THE GRANDFATHER [*becoming suddenly undecided*]. No, no, not now — not yet.

THE UNCLE. You see, you are not reasonable.

THE GRANDFATHER. One never knows how much a man has been unable to express in his life! . . . Who made that noise?

THE ELDEST DAUGHTER. It is the lamp flickering, grandfather.

THE GRANDFATHER. It seems to me to be very unsteady — very!

THE DAUGHTER. It is the cold wind troubling it . . .

THE UNCLE. There is no cold wind, the windows are shut.

THE DAUGHTER. I think it is going out.

THE FATHER. There is no more oil.

THE DAUGHTER. It has gone right out.

THE FATHER. We cannot stay like this in the dark.

THE UNCLE. Why not? — I am quite accustomed to it.

THE FATHER. There is a light in my wife's room.

THE UNCLE. We will take it from there presently, when the doctor has been.

THE FATHER. Well, we can see enough here; there is the light from outside.

THE GRANDFATHER. Is it light outside?

THE FATHER. Lighter than here.

THE UNCLE. For my part, I would as soon talk in the dark.

THE FATHER. So would I. [*Silence.*]

THE GRANDFATHER. It seems to me the clock makes a great deal of noise . . .

THE ELDEST DAUGHTER. That is because we are not talking any more, grandfather.

THE GRANDFATHER. But why are you all silent?

THE UNCLE. What do you want us to talk about? — You are really very peculiar to-night.

THE GRANDFATHER. Is it very dark in this room?

THE UNCLE. There is not much light. [*Silence.*]

THE GRANDFATHER. I do not feel well, Ursula; open the window a little.

THE FATHER. Yes, child; open the window a little. I begin to feel the want of air myself. [*The girl opens the window.*]

THE UNCLE. I really believe we have stayed shut up too long.

THE GRANDFATHER. Is the window open?

THE DAUGHTER. Yes, grandfather; it is wide open.

THE GRANDFATHER. One would not have thought it was open; there was not a sound outside.

THE DAUGHTER. No, grandfather; there is not the slightest sound.

THE FATHER. The silence is extraordinary!

THE DAUGHTER. One could hear an angel tread!

THE UNCLE. That is why I do not like the country.

THE GRANDFATHER. I wish I could hear some sound. What o'clock is it, Ursula?

THE DAUGHTER. It will soon be midnight, grandfather. [*Here the Uncle begins to pace up and down the room.*]

THE GRANDFATHER. Who is that walking round us like that?

THE UNCLE. Only I! only I! Do not be frightened! I want to walk about a little. [*Silence.*] — But I am going to sit down again; — I cannot see where I am going. [*Silence.*]

THE GRANDFATHER. I wish I were out of this place.

THE DAUGHTER. Where would you like to go, grandfather?

THE GRANDFATHER. I do not know where — into another room, no matter where! no matter where!

THE FATHER. Where could we go?

THE UNCLE. It is too late to go anywhere else. [*Silence. They are sitting, motionless, round the table.*]

THE GRANDFATHER. What is that I hear, Ursula?

THE DAUGHTER. Nothing, grandfather; it is the leaves falling.— Yes, it is the leaves falling on the terrace.

THE GRANDFATHER. Go and shut the window, Ursula.

THE DAUGHTER. Yes, grandfather. [*She shuts the window, comes back, and sits down.*]

THE GRANDFATHER. I am cold. [*Silence. The Three Sisters kiss each other.*] What is that I hear now?

THE FATHER. It is the three sisters kissing each other.

THE UNCLE. It seems to me they are very pale this evening. [*Silence.*]

THE GRANDFATHER. What is that I hear now, Ursula?

THE DAUGHTER. Nothing, grandfather; it is the clasping of my hands. [*Silence.*]

THE GRANDFATHER. And that? . . .

THE DAUGHTER. I do not know, grandfather . . . perhaps my sisters are trembling a little? . . .

THE GRANDFATHER. I am afraid, too, my children. [*Here a ray of moonlight penetrates through a corner of the stained glass, and throws strange gleams here and there in the room. A clock strikes midnight; at the last stroke there is a very vague sound, as of some one rising in haste.*]

THE GRANDFATHER [*shuddering with peculiar horror*]. Who is that who got up?

THE UNCLE. No one got up!

THE FATHER. I did not get up!

THE THREE DAUGHTERS. Nor I! — Nor I! — Nor I!

THE GRANDFATHER. Some one got up from the table!

THE UNCLE. Light the lamp! . . . [*Cries of terror are suddenly heard from the child's room, on the right; these cries continue, with gradations of horror, until the end of the scene.*]

THE FATHER. Listen to the child!

THE UNCLE. He has never cried before!

THE FATHER. Let us go and see him!

THE UNCLE. The light! The light! [*At this moment, quick and heavy steps are heard in the room on the left.— Then a deathly silence.— They listen in mute terror, until the door of the room opens slowly; the light from it is cast into the room where they are sitting, and the Sister of Mercy appears on the threshold, in her black garments, and bows as she makes the sign of the cross, to announce the death of the wife. They understand, and, after a moment of hesitation and fright, silently enter the chamber of death, while the Uncle politely steps aside on the threshold to let the three girls pass. The blind man, left alone, gets up, agitated, and feels his way round the table in the darkness.*]

THE GRANDFATHER. Where are you going? — Where are you going? — The girls have left me all alone!

[*Curtain.*]

INTERLUDE

By Federico More

Translated from the Spanish by Audrey Alden.

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PERSONS

THE MARQUISE.
THE POET.

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INTERLUDE

By Federico More

Scene: A Salon.

Marquise [*entering*].
It is chic yet full of peril to be a marquise, betrothed
And on the brim of nineteen, with two whole years'
Devotion at the convent behind her. Well may the man
I am to marry place his faith in me.
And yet, I am obsessed with the sweet indecision
Of having met a poet who will shrive me in verse,
Drape my life with the vigor of his youth
Yet never kiss me.

Poet [*entering*].
I was looking for you, madame.

Marquise.
Well, here I am.

Poet.
Does the dance tire you or the music displease?

Marquise.
It has never before displeased me, and yet — now —

Poet.
In a life
Happy as yours, joy is reborn,
Your moods are versatile, and charming, marquise . . .
Bad humor de luxe . . . perhaps mere caprice. . . .

Marquise.
Perhaps mere caprice . . . perhaps; but I am prey
To something more profound, something warmer. . . .

Poet.
Have I not told you
That in happy lives such as your high-placed life
There is nothing of ennui, nothing to lead astray,
Nothing to spur you on, nothing to unfold,
Nor any dim wraith stalking by your side?

Marquise.
Ah, you have uttered my thought. I feel as though a ghost walked with me.

Poet.
And I could almost swear
You do not feel your grief molded as the phantom wills.

Marquise.
I do feel it. There is a spell,
An echo from afar.

Poet.
Nerves . . . the dance . . fatigue!
Too many perfumes . . . too many mirrors. . . .

Marquise.
And the lack of a voice I love.

Poet.
Oh do not be romantic. Don't distort life.
Romance has always proved an evil scourge.

Marquise.
But you, a poet . . . are not you romantic?

Poet.
I? Never.

Marquise.
Then how do you write your verse?

Poet.
I make poems
The way your seamstresses make your dresses.

Marquise.
With a pattern and a measure?

Poet.
With a pattern and a measure.

Marquise.
Impossible! Poets give tongue to truth sublime.

POET.
Pardon, marquise, but it is folly
To think that poems are something more than needles
On which to thread the truth.
MARQUISE.
Truly, are they no more than that?
POET.
Ephemeral and vain, in this age
Poetry is woven of agile thought.
MARQUISE.
What of the sort that weeps and yearns most woe-begone?
Poignancy that is the ending of a poem?
POET.
All that
Is reached with the noble aid of a consonant
As great love is reached with a kiss.
MARQUISE.
And what of the void in which my soul is lost
Since no one, poet . . . no one cries his need for me. . . .
POET.
Do not say that, marquise. I can assure you . . .
MARQUISE.
That I am a motif for a handful of consonants?
POET.
Nonsense! I swear it by your clear eyes. . . .
MARQUISE.
Comparable, I suppose, in verse to two clear diamonds. . . .
POET.
You scoff, but love is very serious. . . .
MARQUISE.
Love serious, poet? A betrothal, it may be, is serious,
Arranged by grave-faced parents with stately rites;
Yawns are serious and so is repletion.
POET.
But tell me, whence comes this deep cynicism?
MARQUISE.
Oh, do not take it ill. I say it but in jest,
Merely because I like to laugh at the abyss,
What do you think, poet?
POET.
Well, marquise, I must confess
That I am capable of feeling various loves.
MARQUISE.
Then you were born for various women.
POET.
No, I was born for various sorrows.
MARQUISE.
Or, by the same token, for various pleasures.
POET.
Sheer vanity! Women always presume
That their mere earthly presence gives men pleasure.
MARQUISE.
You are clear-witted
And a pattern of such good commonsense. Who would believe
That a poet, dabbler in every sort of folly,
May turn discreet when mysterious love beckons?
POET.
Mysterious love? Marquise, that is not so. . . . Love has abandons
Irrestrainable.
MARQUISE.
And shame restrains them.
POET.
But what has shame to do with poetry?
It has no worth, it is a social value,
Value of a marquise, par excellence.
MARQUISE.
None the less, shame is a resigned and subtle justice,
The justice of women, poet.
POET.
Which is no justice at all.
MARQUISE.
Poet, the stones you throw
In your defeat, will fall upon your head.
POET.
That is my destiny. Your rising sun
Can never know the splendor of my sun that sets.
MARQUISE.
The fault is nowise mine. . . .
POET.
True. . . . I am insane
And a madman is insane, marquise, although he reason.
MARQUISE.
Oh, reason, poet. I would convince you
That even a marquise may be sincere.

POET.
And I, my lady, I would fain believe it.
MARQUISE.
Believe it then, I beg of you.
POET.
But there is this:
A marquise might also lose her head.
MARQUISE.
True she might lose her head . . . but for a rhyme?
POET.
Which, no matter how true, will always be a lie.
[*Pause.*]
MARQUISE.
But why did you protest against my skepticism?
POET.
I riddled your words, but protested for myself.
MARQUISE.
So vain a reason, and so selfish?
POET.
A prideful reason . . . I stand aghast before the abyss.
MARQUISE.
I see that all your love has been in verse.
POET.
No, marquise, but life
Cradles crude truths which the poet disdains.
MARQUISE.
And amiable truths which passion passes by.
POET.
But about which the dreamer's world revolves.
MARQUISE.
I do not dream, I wish . . .
POET.
I know well what I wish . . .
MARQUISE.
Well then, we wish that it should not be merely a consonant.
POET.
No, rather that it should be poetry.
MARQUISE.
Suppose that it were so, would it content you?
POET.
It is enough for me, and yet I fear
That this pale poetry, untried, unlived,
Can have no driving urge.
MARQUISE.
Why then should we refuse to live it?
POET.
I shall tell you. It is not in high-born taste
To trifle with a heart.
The love of a marquise is the problematic
Love of elegance and froth,
And like other love a sort of mathematic
Love of addition, subtraction and division.
It is not rude passion, fierce, emphatic,
Song and orchestral counterpoint of life.
It is what the world would name platonic,
Love without fire, without virility,
With nothing of creation, nothing tonic,
One-step love, love of society.
And I will have none of this love sardonic,
None of its desperate futility.
MARQUISE.
I do not fear you though you are a poet,
And I say things to you, no other ears would endure.
You were not born, poor anchorite,
To say to a woman: "Be mine."
And such is your secret vanity,
You are a servile vassal of your own Utopia.
You pretend to transform women
Into laurel branches meaningless,
And with your cynic's blare
You thread upon the needle of your pride
Dregs from the utter depths of the abyss.
POET.
Marquise, a poet's love has led you astray.
MARQUISE.
Oh, don't be vain and fanciful. I swear
That in my placid life, happiness brings no joy.
What I longed for was a love, profound and mature,
The profound love of a poet come to being,
And not the incongruities of adolescence in verse. . . .
The radiant synthesis of a pungent existence

And not the disloyalties of a dispersed dream.
What woman has not dreamed of loving a poet
Who would be conqueror and conquered all in one?
What woman has not wished to be humble and forgiving
With the man who sings the great passions he has known?
We need you poets. . . . We are tormented by the desire
Of a harmonious life, filled with deep sound,
With the vigor and strength of wine poured out
Into bowls of truths, deep with the depth of death.
We crave no water, lymphatic, pure,
In glasses of wind, frail as life.
Better the vintage of the rich
Served in vile glasses of gold. And if the mind be coarse,
Perchance the hands will glitter with many stones.
And if I may not have a fragrant and well-ordered nest
Filled with clear rhythm and little blond heads,
Then let me have my palace where luxurious pleasure
Lends to love of earth, grief and deep dismay.
Why do you not love living, poets? Why is it,
The dullard who nor loves nor lives poaches your kisses?

POET.

I do not comprehend, marquise. Why love living,
If that is to live loving? We know that life and love
Are wings forever fledging out
In a bird neither swan nor hawk.
I am resigned to my unequal destiny, for I know
That my two eyes cannot perceive the same color.
For even when there is calm, anxiety arises
And then, I am not master, not even of my pain.
I would be your friend, but there are obstacles,
Captious dynamics, that put a check upon my words.
I yield to the dumb pride of my huge torment,
The song without words, the sonorous silence,
And I do not desire any one to penetrate
The garden wherein flowers the mystery I adore.

MARQUISE.

Conserve your mysteries, poet; they will have no heirs.

POET.

Death is the heir of everything impenetrable.

MARQUISE.

But only during life do the words of the sphinx
Possess a meaning for our ears.

POET.

I am terror-stricken by the sphinx.

MARQUISE.

Coward! The sun blinds him who cannot hearken to the sphinx.
[*Sounds of music in the distance.*]

POET.

Does not the music tempt you?

MARQUISE.

It does, and I feel sure
My lover must be waiting. Will you come with me?

POET.

No, thanks. I shall remain and think of what has died.

MARQUISE.

May you have the protection of my defunct illusion.
[*She goes out.*]

[*Curtain.*]

MONSIEUR LAMBLIN

A Comedy

By George Ancey

Translated from the French by Barrett H. Clark

CHARACTERS

LAMBLIN.
MARTHE.
MADAME BAIL.
MADAME COGÉ.
SERVANT.

First published in the *Stratford Journal*, March, 1917. Reprinted by permission of Mr. Barrett H. Clark.

MONSIEUR LAMBLIN

A Comedy

By George Ancey

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[*A stylish drawing-room. There are doors at the back, and on each side. Down-stage to the right is a window; near it, but protected by a screen, is a large arm-chair near a sewing-table. Down-stage opposite is a fire-place, on each side of which, facing it, are a sofa and another large arm-chair; next the sofa is a small table, and next to it, in turn, a stool and two chairs. This part of the stage should be so arranged as to make a little cozy-corner. The set is completed by various and sundry lamps, vases with flowers, and the like.*

As the curtain rises, the servant enters to Lamblin, Marthe and Madame Bail, bringing coffee and cigarettes, which he lays on the small table.]

Lamblin [*settling comfortably into his chair*]. Ah, how comfortable it is! Mm — ! [*To Marthe.*] Serve us our coffee, my child, serve us our coffee.

Marthe [*sadly*]. Yes, yes.

Lamblin [*aside*]. Always something going round and round in that little head of hers! Needn't worry about it — nothing serious.— Well, Mother-in-law, what do you say to the laces, eh?

Madame Bail. Delicious! It must have cost a small fortune! You have twenty yards there!

Lamblin. Five thousand francs! Five thousand francs! [*To Marthe.*] Yes, madame, your husband was particularly generous. He insists upon making his wife the most beautiful of women and giving her everything her heart desires. Has he succeeded?

Marthe. Thank you. I've really never seen such lovely malines. Madame Pertuis ordered some lately and they're not nearly so beautiful as these.

Lamblin. I'm glad to hear it. Well, aren't you going to kiss your husband — for his trouble? [*She kisses him.*] Good! There, now.

Madame Bail [*to Lamblin*]. You spoil her!

Lamblin [*to Marthe*]. Do I spoil you?

Marthe. Yes, yes, of course.

Labmlin. That's right. Everybody happy? That's all we can ask, isn't that so, Mamma Bail? Take care, I warn you! If you continue to look at me that way I'm likely to become dangerous!

Madame Bail. Silly man.

Lamblin. Ha!

Madame Bail [*to Marthe*]. Laugh, why don't you?

Marthe. I do.

Lamblin [*bringing his wife to him and putting her upon his knee*]. No, no, but you don't laugh enough, little one. Now, to punish you, I'm going to give you another kiss. [*He kisses her.*]

Marthe. Oh! Your beard pricks so! Now, take your coffee, or it'll get cold, and then you'll scold Julie again. [*A pause.*]

Lamblin. It looks like pleasant weather to-morrow!

Madame Bail. What made you think of that?

Lamblin. The particles of sugar have all collected at the bottom of my cup. [*He drinks his coffee.*]

Madame Bail. As a matter of fact, I hope the weather will be nice.

Lamblin. Do you have to go out?

Madame Bail. I must go to Argentuil.

Lamblin. Now, my dear mother-in-law, what are you going to do at Argentuil? I have an idea that there must be some old general there — ?

Madame Bail [*ironically*]. Exactly! How would you like it if — ?

Lamblin. Don't joke about such things!

MADAME BAIL. You needn't worry! Catch me marrying again!

LAMBLIN [*timidly*]. There is a great deal to be said for the happiness of married life.

MADAME BAIL. For the men!

LAMBLIN. For every one. Is not the hearth a refuge, a sacred spot, where both man and woman find sweet rest after a day's work? Deny it, Mother. Here we are, the three of us, each doing what he likes to do, in our comfortable little home, talking together happily. The mind is at rest, and the heart quiet. Six years of family life have brought us security in our affection, and rendered us kind and indulgent toward one another. It is ineffably sweet, and brings tears to the eyes. [*He starts to take a sip of cognac.*]

MARTHE [*preventing him*]. Especially when one is a little — lit up!

MADAME BAIL. Marthe, that's not at all nice of you!

LAMBLIN [*to Madame Bail*]. Ah, you're the only one who understands me, Mother! Now, little one, you're going to give me a cigar, one of those on the table.

MARTHE [*giving him a cigar*]. Lazy! He can't even stretch his arm out!

LAMBLIN. You see, I prefer to have my little wife serve me and be nice to me.

MADAME BAIL [*looking at them both*]. Shall I go?

LAMBLIN. Why should you?

MADAME BAIL. Well — because —

LAMBLIN [*understanding*]. Oh! No, no, stay with us and tell us stories. The little one is moody and severe, I don't dare risk putting my arm around her. Her religion forbids her — expanding!

MADAME BAIL. Then you don't think I'll be in the way?

LAMBLIN. You, Mother! I tell you, the day I took it into my head to bring you here to live with us, I was an extremely clever man. It's most convenient to have you here. Men of business like me haven't the time to spend all their leisure moments with their wives. Very often, after a day's work at the office, I'm not at liberty to spend the evening at home: I must return to the office, you know.

MARTHE. As you did yesterday!

LAMBLIN. As I did yesterday. And when I take it into my head to stroll along the boulevard —

MADAME BAIL. Or elsewhere!

LAMBLIN. You insist on your little joke, Mother. If, I say, I take it into my head to go out, there's the little one all alone. You came here to live with us, and now my conscious is easy: I leave my little wife in good hands. I need not worry. There were a thousand liberties I never indulged in before you came. Now I take them without the slightest scruple.

MADAME BAIL. How kind of you!

LAMBLIN. Don't you think so, little one?

MARTHE. I believe that Mamma did exactly the right thing.

LAMBLIN. You see, I want people to be happy. It is not enough that I should be: every one must be who is about me. I can't abide selfish people.

MADAME BAIL. You're right!

LAMBLIN. And it's so easy not to be! [*A pause.*] There is only one thing worrying me now: I brought a whole package of papers with me from the office, which I must sign.

MARTHE. How is business now?

LAMBLIN. Not very good.

MARTHE. Did M. Pacot reimburse you?

MADAME BAIL. Yes, did he?

LAMBLIN. It's been pretty hard these past three days, but I am reimbursed, and that's all I ask. Now I'm going to sign my papers. It won't take me more than a quarter of an hour. I'll find you here when I come back, shan't I? [*To Marthe.*] And the little one will leave me my cognac, eh? See you soon.

MADAME BAIL. Yes, see you soon.

LAMBLIN [*to Marthe*]. You'll let me have my cognac?

MARTHE. No! It's ridiculous! It'll make you ill. [*Lamblin goes out.*]

MADAME BAIL. There's a good boy!

MARTHE. You always stand up for him. The world is full of "good boys" of his sort. "Good boys"! They're all selfish!

MADAME BAIL. Don't get so excited!

MARTHE. I'm not in the least excited. I'm as calm now as I was excited a year ago when I learned of Alfred's affair.

MADAME BAIL. I understand.

MARTHE. No, you don't understand.

MADAME BAIL. You didn't behave at all reasonably, as you ought to have done long since. You still have absurd romantic ideas. You're not at all reasonable.

MARTHE [*very much put out*]. Well, if I still have those absurd ideas, if I rebel at times, if, as you say, I'm unreasonable, whom does it harm but me alone? What do you expect? The bare idea of sharing him is repulsive to me. Think of it a moment — how perfectly abominable it all is! Why, we are practically accomplices! I thought we were going to discuss it with him just now! It will happen, I know!

MADAME BAIL. What do you intend to do about it? You keep on saying the same thing. I'm an experienced woman. Why don't you take my word, and be a philosopher, the way all women are, the way I've had to be more than once? If you think for one moment that your own father — ! Well, we won't say anything about him.

MARTHE. Philosopher, philosopher! A nice way to put it! In what way is that Mathilde Cogé, who is his mistress, better than I? I'd like to know that!

MADAME BAIL. In any event, he might have done much worse. She is a widow, a woman of the world, and she isn't ruining him. I know her slightly; I've seen her at Madame Parent's. She just seems a little mad, and not in the least spiteful!

MARTHE [*raging*]. Ah!

MADAME BAIL. But what are you going to do about it?

MARTHE. It would be best to separate.

MADAME BAIL. Why didn't you think of that sooner? You know very well you'd be sorry the moment you'd done it.

MARTHE. Don't you think that would be best for us all? What am I doing here? What hopes have I for the future? Merely to complete the happiness of Monsieur, who deigns to see in me an agreeable nurse, who occasionally likes to rest by my side after his escapades elsewhere! Thank you so much! I might just as well go!

MADAME BAIL. That would be madness. You wouldn't be so foolish as to do it.

MARTHE. Yes — I know — society would blame me!

MADAME BAIL. That's the first point. We should submit to everything rather than do as some others do and fly in the face of convention. We belong to society.

MARTHE. In that case I should at least have peace.

MADAME BAIL. Peace! Nothing of the sort, my dear. You know very well, you would have regrets.

MARTHE [*ironically*]. What regrets?

MADAME BAIL. God knows! Perhaps, though you don't know it, you still love him, in some hidden corner of your heart. You may pity him. You can go a long way with that feeling. Perhaps you have same vague hope — [*Marthe is about to speak.*] Well, we won't say any more about that. And then you are religious, you have a big forgiving soul. Aren't these sufficient reasons for waiting? You may regret it. Believe me, my dear child. [*Marthe stands silent, and Madame Bail changes her attitude and tone of voice.*] Now, you must admit, you haven't so much to complain of. Your husband is far from the worst; indeed, he's one of the best. What would you do if you were in Madame Ponceau's position? Her husband spends all their money and stays away for two and three months at a time. He goes away, is not seen anywhere, and when he returns, he has the most terrible scenes with poor Marie, and even beats her! Now, Alfred is very good to you, pays you all sorts of attentions, he comes home three evenings a week, gives you all sorts of presents. And these laces! He never bothers you or abuses you. See how nice he was just a few minutes ago, simple and natural! He was lovely, and said the pleasantest imaginable things.

MARTHE [*bitterly*]. He flattered you!

MADAME BAIL. That isn't the reason!

MARTHE. That you say nice things about him? Nonsense! He pleases and amuses you. You don't want me to apply for a separation because you want him near you, and because you are afraid of what people will say. Be frank and admit it.

MADAME BAIL. Marthe, that's not at all nice of you.

MARTHE. It's the truth.

MADAME BAIL. No, no, nothing of the sort.

MARTHE. Another thing that grates on me in this life we are leading is to see the way my mother takes her son-in-law's part against me. You find excuses for him on every occasion; and your one fear seems to be that he should hear some random word that will wound him; and the proof is that he never interrupts one of our conversations — which are always on the same subject — but that you don't fail to make desperate signs to me to keep still!

MADAME BAIL. What an idea! [*Marthe is about to reply, when Madame Bail perceives Lamblin reëntering, and signs to Martha to say nothing more.*] It's he! [*Marthe shrugs her shoulders.*]

[*Enter Lamblin.*]

LAMBLIN [*joyfully*]. There, that's done. One hundred and two signatures. Kiss me, little one. In less than an hour I've earned a thousand francs for us. Isn't that splendid?

[*Enter a servant.*]

SERVANT. Monsieur?

LAMBLIN. What is it?

SERVANT [*embarrassed*]. Some one — from the office — who wishes to speak with Monsieur.

LAMBLIN. From the office? At this time?

SERVANT. Yes, Monsieur.

LAMBLIN. Say that I am with my family, and that I am not receiving any one.

SERVANT. That is what I said, but the — person — insists.

LAMBLIN. How annoying!

MADAME BAIL. See him, dear, Marthe and I will go out and you may see him here. No one will disturb you.

MARTHE. Yes, it's best to see him! [*They make ready to go out; pick up their work, and so on.*]

LAMBLIN [*to the servant*]. Tell him to come in. [*The servant goes out.*]

MARTHE [*to Madame Bail, as she points after the servant*]. Did you notice? Adolphe was very embarrassed!

MADAME BAIL. Now what are you going to worry about?

MARTHE. I tell you, I saw it! [*The women go out.*]

LAMBLIN. This is too much! Not a moment of peace!

[*Enter Madame Cogé.*]

You?

MADAME COGÉ. What do you think of my trick?

LAMBLIN. Detestable as well as dangerous.

MADAME COGÉ. Come, come. I wanted to go to the *Bouffes*, and I wanted you to go with me. It's nine o'clock, but we'll be in time for the principal play.

LAMBLIN. No, no, no, impossible. And what do you mean by falling upon me this way without warning! My dear Mathilde, what were you thinking about?

MADAME COGÉ. I decided this morning. You were so nice yesterday!

LAMBLIN. You must go at once! What if some one found you here?

MADAME COGÉ. Your wife? Quick, then, we must be going. Take your hat, say good-by. I'll wait for you downstairs. I have a cab. [*A pause.*]

LAMBLIN. I tell you, it's out of the question. Go alone. I have a headache — I've smoked too much.

MADAME COGÉ. You refuse? And I was looking forward so — !

LAMBLIN. Now, listen to me, my dear: I have told you once for all, I'm not a rounder. I like everything well regulated. I have my own little habits, and I don't like something to come along and upset everything. I'm very much of a family man, I've often impressed that fact upon you, and I'm astonished, perfectly astonished, that you don't take that into account.

MADAME COGÉ [*in a high voice*]. You make me tired. So there.

LAMBLIN. Don't scream so! I tell you, I wouldn't go out to-night for anything under the sun. Yesterday, Heaven knows, I was only too happy to be with you: we enjoyed ourselves; it was most pleasant. As for this evening — no: to-morrow. We decided on Mondays, Wednesday, Fridays, and a Sunday from time to time. I have no wish to alter that schedule. I'm regulated like a cuckoo clock. You don't seem to believe that. I strike when I'm intended to strike.

MADAME COGÉ. That is as much as to say that you like me three days a week, and the rest of the time I mean as little to you as the Grand Turk! That's a queer kind of love!

LAMBLIN. Not at all. I think of you

very often, and if you were to disappear, I should miss you a great deal. Only it's a long way between that and disturbing my equilibrium.

MADAME COGÉ. And I suppose you love your wife?

LAMBLIN. Are you jealous?

MADAME COGÉ. I am, and I have reason to be be. . . .

LAMBLIN. How childish of you! You know very well that you are the only woman, only —

MADAME COGÉ. Ah, there is an "only"!

LAMBLIN. Yes,— only, just because I love you is no reason why I should feel no affection for her, and that you should treat her as you do! She is so devoted!

MADAME COGÉ. What is there so extraordinary about her?

LAMBLIN [*becoming excited*]. She does for me what others would not do — you for instance! She has a steady affection for me; I keep it for my bad moments; her action doesn't turn in every wind. You should see her, so resigned, so anxious to do everything for my comfort and convenience! She's worried when I have a headache, she runs for my slippers when I come home in wet weather — from your house! [*Deeply moved.*] You see that cognac there? That was the second glass I poured out for myself this evening; the moment I started to drink it her little hand stretched forth and took it from me, because she said I would make myself ill! [*He starts to weep.*] You know, I poured it out just in order that she should prevent my drinking it. These things stir the heart! [*A pause.*] Now you must go.

MADAME COGÉ. No, no. I love you, and I —

LAMBLIN. You are selfish. And you know I can't stand selfish people. You want to deprive me of a quiet evening in the bosom of my family.

MADAME COGÉ. I want you to love me, and me alone. I want you to leave your home if need be.

LAMBLIN. Yes, and if I were to fall sick — which might happen, though I have a strong constitution, thank God! — I know you. You're the best woman in the world, but that doesn't prevent your being a little superficial!

MADAME COGÉ. Superficial!

LAMBLIN. Yes, you are, and you can't deny it! Your dropping in on me, like a bolt from the blue, proves it conclusively. And when you once begin chattering about yourself, about your dresses, oh, my! You never stop. You can't be serious, your conversation is not the sort that pleases a man, flatters and amuses him.

MADAME COGÉ. Oh!

LAMBLIN. You never talk about *him!* One night I remember, I was a little sick and you sent me home. *There* they made tea for me. The cook was already in bed, and Marthe didn't hesitate an instant to go to the kitchen and soil her hands!

MADAME COGÉ. When was that? When was that?

LAMBLIN. For God's sake, don't scream so! Not more than two weeks ago.

MADAME COGÉ. You didn't say what was the matter with you, that's all.

LAMBLIN. I complained enough, Heaven knows. [*A pause.*]

MADAME COGÉ. Then you won't come?

LAMBLIN. No.

MADAME COGÉ [*resolutely*]. Very well, then, farewell.

LAMBLIN. Now, you mustn't get angry. [*He puts his arm round her waist*]. You know I can't do without you. You are always my dear little Mathilde, my darling little girl. Aren't you? Do you remember yesterday, eh? You know I love you — deeply?

MADAME COGÉ. On Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and from time to time on Sundays. Thanks! [*She starts to go.*]

LAMBLIN. Mathilde!

MADAME COGÉ. Good evening. [*Returning to him.*] Do you want me to tell you something? Though I may be superficial, *you* are a selfish egotist, and you find your happiness in the tears and suffering of those who love you! Good-by! [*She starts to go again.*]

LAMBLIN. Mathilde, Mathilde, dear! To-morrow?

MADAME COGÉ [*returning*]. Do you want me to tell you something else? When a man is married and wants to have a mistress, he would do much better and act more uprightly to leave his wife!

LAMBLIN [*simply*]. Why?

MADAME COGÉ. Why? — Good evening! [*She goes out.*]

LAMBLIN. Mathilde, Mathilde! Did I make her angry? Oh, she'll forget it all in a quarter of an hour. My, what a headache! [*Catching sight of Marthe, who enters from the right.*] Marthe! She looks furious! She saw Mathilde go out! What luck!

MARTHE [*furiously*]. Who was that who just left?

LAMBLIN. Why —

MARTHE. Who was that who just left? Answer me!

LAMBLIN. It was —

MARTHE. Madame Cogé, wasn't it? Don't lie, I saw her! What can you be thinking of? To bring your mistress here! I don't know what's prevented my going away before, and leaving you to your debauchery! This is the end — understand? I've had enough. You're going to live alone from now on. [*He starts to speak.*] Alone. Good-by, monsieur!

LAMBLIN [*moved*]. Marthe! [*She dashes out. Lamblin goes to the door through which Marthe has gone.*] Marthe, Marthe, little one! Tell me that you forgive me. [*Coming down-stage.*] It's all up! Good Lord!

[*Enter Madame Bail.*]

LAMBLIN [*goes to her, nearly in tears*]. Oh, Mother, all is lost!

MADAME BAIL. No, no, you great child! I know everything, and I promise it will be all right.

LAMBLIN. No, no, I tell you. Marthe told me she wanted to leave me.

MADAME BAIL. Now, don't carry on that way. I don't want to see you cry.

LAMBLIN. But how can I be calm when my whole future is ruined?

MADAME BAIL. Nothing of the sort. Don't you think I know my own daughter? She is too well educated, she has too much common sense, to leave you.

LAMBLIN [*a little consoled*]. You think so? Oh, if that were only true!

MADAME BAIL. But it is true! She's crying now; her tears will ease her, and make her change her mind.

LAMBLIN. Yes, yes, let her cry, let her cry all she wants to!

MADAME BAIL. I tell you she is yours; she loves you.

LAMBLIN [*brightening*]. Is that true? [*Madame Bail nods.*] How happy I am! [*A pause. His attitude changes.*] But there's one thing that troubles me.

MADAME BAIL. What?

LAMBLIN [*embarrassed*]. No, nothing.

MADAME BAIL. Confide in me. Tell me. [*A pause.*]

LAMBLIN. Well, that lady who came here this evening — I'm afraid I was a little short with her. I think I offended her. I practically showed her the door.

MADAME BAIL. Don't worry about that. Perhaps you weren't so rude as you thought you were.

LAMBLIN. No, I'm sure. I know very well that —

MADAME BAIL. You mustn't worry and get all excited —

LAMBLIN. Do you know anything about it?

MADAME BAIL. No, nothing, only — as I rather suspected what was going on in here — and was afraid — of a quarrel — I met her as she was going out, and I — spoke to her.

LAMBLIN [*taking her hands — joyfully*]. I thank you! [*They are both embarrassed for a moment, then sit down.*] Ah, good. Well, and Marthe?

MADAME BAIL [*pointing to Marthe who enters*]. There she is. What did I tell you? [*Marthe enters without saying a word. She brings her work, Madame Bail takes up hers, and sits next her. A pause. Madame Bail speaks to Marthe.*] What a pretty design! Where did you find the pattern?

MARTHE. I just picked it up at the store.

MADAME BAIL. It's charming. I must get one like it.

LAMBLIN [*ill at ease*]. May I see it, little one? [*Marthe unrolls the embroidery for him and shows it.*] Oh, it's perfectly lovely! We men would be hard put to it to make anything half as beautiful! [*He laughs awkwardly, and pours out some cognac, in full sight of Marthe.*]

MARTHE [*quickly*]. That's ridiculous, Alfred. [*Then she says slowly, as she lowers her eyes.*] You'll make yourself ill!

LAMBLIN [*in perfect contentment*]. How charming she is!

[*Curtain.*]

FRANÇOISE' LUCK

A Comedy

By Georges de Porto-Riche

(La Chance de Françoise.)

Translated by Barrett H. Clark.

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PERSONS REPRESENTED

MARCEL DESROCHES.
GUÉRIN.
JEAN.
FRANÇOISE.
MADELEINE.

SCENE: *Auteuil.*
TIME: *Present.*

Presented for the first time December 10, 1888, in Paris, at the Théâtre Libre.

FRANÇOISE' LUCK is reprinted from "Four Plays of the Free Theatre," translated by Barrett H. Clark by permission of Messrs. Stewart & Kidd Company, Cincinnati, Ohio.

FRANÇOISE' LUCK

A Comedy

By Georges de Porto-Riche

[*A studio. At the back is a door opening upon a garden; doors to the right and left; likewise a small inconspicuous door to the left. There are a few pictures on easels. The table is littered with papers, books, weapons, bric-a-brac. Chairs and sofas. It is eleven o'clock in the morning.*]

Françoise [*a small, frail woman, with a melancholy look, at times rather mocking. As the curtain rises she is alone. She raises and lowers the window-blind from time to time*]. A little more! There! Oh, the sunlight! How blinding! [*Glancing at the studio with satisfaction.*] How neat everything is! [*In attempting to take something from the table, she knocks some papers to the floor.*] Well! [*Seeing a letter, among the papers she is picking up.*] A letter! From Monsieur Guérin — [*Reading.*] "My dear friend, why do you persist in keeping silence? You say very little of the imprudent woman who has dared to become the companion of the handsome Marcel! Do you recompense her for her confidence in you, for her courage? You are not at all like other men: your frivolity, if you will permit the term, your —" [*Interrupting herself.*] He writes the word! [*Continuing.*] "Your cynicism makes me tremble for you. Absent for a year! How much friendship gone to waste! Why were we thrust apart the moment you were married? Why did my wife's health make sunlight an absolute necessity for her? We are now leaving Rome; in a month I'll drop in on you at Auteuil —" [*Interrupting herself again.*] Very soon!

[*Marcel appears at the back.*]

"I am very impatient to see you, and very anxious to see Madame Desroches. I wonder whether she will take to me? I hope she will. Take care, you villain, I shall cross-question her carefully, and if I find the slightest shadow upon her happiness, her friend-to-be will be an angry man." [*She stops reading and says to herself, sadly.*] A friend — I should like that!

Marcel [*carelessly dressed. He is of the type that appeals to women*]. Ah, inquisitive, you read my letters?

Françoise. Oh, it's an old one —

Marcel [*chaffing her*]. From Guérin?

Françoise. I found it there, when I was putting the studio in order.

Marcel [*tenderly*]. The little romantic child is looking for a friend?

Françoise. I have so much to tell, so much about my recent happiness!

Marcel. Am I not that friend?

Françoise. You are the man I love. Should I consult with you, where your happiness is concerned?

Marcel. Too deep for me! [*Yawning.*] Oh, I'm tired!

Françoise. Did you come in late last night?

Marcel. Three o'clock.

Françoise. You were very quiet, you naughty man!

Marcel. Were you jealous?

Françoise. The idea! I am morally certain that you love no one except your wife.

Marcel [*sadly*]. It's true, I love no one except my wife.

Françoise [*chaffing him in turn*]. Poor Marcel!

Marcel. I was bored to death at that supper; I can't imagine why.— They all tell me I'm getting stout.

Françoise. That's no reason why you shouldn't please.

Marcel. God is very unjust.

Françoise. So they say!

Marcel [*stretching out on a sofa*].

Excuse my appearance, won't you, Françoise [*Making himself comfortable.*] I can't keep my eyes open any longer nowadays. The days of my youth — Why, I was — [*He stops.*]

FRANÇOISE. You were just the right age for marriage.

MARCEL [*as if to banish the idea*]. Oh! [*A pause.*] I'm sure you will get along well with Guérin. Yours are kindred spirits — you're alike — not in looks, however.

FRANÇOISE. Morally, you mean?

MARCEL. Yes. The comparison flatters him.

FRANÇOISE. He's like this, then; sentimental, a good friend, and a man of honor. Yes, I think I shall get along nicely with him.

MARCEL. What a sympathetic nature you have! You've never seen him, and you know him already.

FRANÇOISE. How long has he been married?

MARCEL. He was born married!

FRANÇOISE. Tell me.

MARCEL. Ten years, I think.

FRANÇOISE. He's happy.

MARCEL. Very.

FRANÇOISE. What sort of woman is she?

MARCEL. Lively.

FRANÇOISE. Though virtuous?

MARCEL. So they say.

FRANÇOISE. Then Madame Guérin and the handsome Martel — eh?

MARCEL. A friend's wife?

FRANÇOISE. It's very tempting — [*Marcel seems to take this with ill-humor; he is about to put on his hat.*] Are you going out?

MARCEL. I lunch at the club.

FRANÇOISE. Very well.

MARCEL. I'm — a little nervous; I need a breath of air.

FRANÇOISE. Paris air!

MARCEL. Precisely.

FRANÇOISE. And your work?

MARCEL. I'm not in the mood.

FRANÇOISE. It's only ten days before the Salon: you'll never be ready.

MARCEL. What chance have I, with my talent?

FRANÇOISE. You have a great deal of talent — it's recognized everywhere.

MARCEL. I did have.

[*A pause.*]

FRANÇOISE. Will you be home for dinner?

MARCEL [*tenderly*]. Of course! And don't allow any black suspicion to get the better of you: I'm not lunching with anybody!

FRANÇOISE. I suspect you!

MARCEL [*gratefully*]. 'Til later, then! [*A pause. Frankly.*] Of course, I don't always go where I tell you I'm going. Why should I worry you? But if you think I — do what I ought not to do, you are mistaken. I'm no longer a bachelor, you know.

FRANÇOISE. Just a trifle, aren't you?

MARCEL. No jealousy, dear! The day of adventures is dead and buried. Thirty-five mortal years, a scarcity of hair, a noticeable rotundity — and married! Opportunities are fewer now!

FRANÇOISE [*playfully*]. Don't lose courage, your luck may return. A minute would suffice.

MARCEL [*mournfully*]. I don't dare hope.

FRANÇOISE. Married! It was never your destiny to be a proprietor, you are doomed to be a tenant.

MARCEL [*as he is about to leave, sees a letter on the table*]. Oh, a letter, and you said nothing to me about it!

FRANÇOISE. I didn't see it. Jean must have brought it while you were asleep.

MARCEL. From Passy! I know that hand! [*Aside, with surprise.*] Madame Guérin — Madeleine! Well! [*Reading.*] "My dear friend, I lunch to-day with my aunt Madame de Monglat, at La Muette — as I used to. Come and see me before noon, I have serious things to discuss with you." [*He stops reading; aside, much pleased.*] A rendezvous! And after three years! Poor Guérin! No! It wouldn't be decent now! No!

FRANÇOISE [*aside*]. He seems to be waking up!

MARCEL [*aside*]. They must have returned! Françoise was right — a minute would suffice! The dear girl!

FRANÇOISE. No bad news?

MARCEL [*in spite of himself*]. On the contrary!

FRANÇOISE. Oh!

MARCEL [*embarrassed*]. It's from that American woman who saw my picture the other day — at Goupil's, you remember? She insists that I give it to her for

ten thousand francs. I really think I'll let her have it. Nowadays you never can tell —

FRANÇOISE. I think you would be very wise to sell.

MARCEL [*handing her the letter*]. Don't you believe me?

FRANÇOISE. Absolutely.

[*Marcel puts the letter in his pocket. A pause.*]

MARCEL [*hesitating before he leaves; aside*]. She's a darling; a perfect little darling.

FRANÇOISE. Then you're not going out?

MARCEL [*surprised*]. Do you want to send me away?

FRANÇOISE. If you're going out to lunch, you had better hurry — the train leaves in a few minutes.

MARCEL [*suddenly affectionate*]. How can I hurry when you are so charming? You're adorable this morning!

FRANÇOISE D'you think so?

[*A pause.*]

MARCEL [*aside*]. Curious, but every time I have a rendezvous, she is like that!

FRANÇOISE. Good-by, then; I've had enough of you! If you stay you'll upset all my plans. I'd quite made up my mind to be melancholy and lonely. It's impossible to be either gay or sad with you! Run along!

MARCEL [*taking off his hat, which he had put on some moments before*]. I tell you this is my house, and this my studio. Your house is there by the garden.

FRANÇOISE. Yes, it's only there that you are my husband.

MARCEL. Oh! [*Reproachfully, and with tenderness.*] Tell me, Françoise, why don't you ever want to go out with me?

FRANÇOISE. You know I don't like society.

MARCEL. I'm seen so much alone!

FRANÇOISE. So much the better for you; you will be taken for a bachelor!

MARCEL. One might think the way you talk, that husband and wife ought never to live together.

FRANÇOISE. Perhaps I'd see you oftener if we weren't married!

MARCEL. Isn't it a pleasure to you, Madame, to be in the arms of your husband?

FRANÇOISE. Isn't it likewise a pleasure to be able to say, "He is free, I am not his wife, he is not my husband; I am not his duty, a millstone around his neck; I am his avocation, his love? If he leaves me, I know he is tired of me, but if he comes back, then I know he loves me"?

MARCEL. Françoise, you are an extremist!

FRANÇOISE. You think so?

MARCEL. You are.

FRANÇOISE. Well?

MARCEL. I know your philosophy is nothing but love. [*A pause.*] You cry sometimes, don't you? When I'm not here?

FRANÇOISE. Just a little.

MARCEL. I make you very unhappy! When you are sad, don't conceal it from me, Françoise; one of your tears would make me do anything in the world for you.

FRANÇOISE. One, yes! But, many?

MARCEL. Don't make fun of me: I am serious. If I told you that my affection for you is as great as yours, I —

FRANÇOISE. You would be lying.

MARCEL. Perhaps! But I think I adore you! Every time I leave you, I feel so lonely; I wander about like a lost soul! I think something must be happening to you. And when I come home at midnight, and open the door, I feel an exquisite sensation — Is that love? You ought to know — you are an adept!

FRANÇOISE. Perhaps.

MARCEL [*unthinkingly*]. You know, Françoise, one can never be sure of one's self.

FRANÇOISE. Of course!

MARCEL. No one can say, "I love today, and I shall love to-morrow." You or any one else.

FRANÇOISE [*offended*]. I?

MARCEL. How can you tell, whether in fifteen years —?

FRANÇOISE. Oh, I'm a little child — I'm different from the others: I shall always love the same man all his life. But go on, you were saying?

MARCEL. Nothing. I want you to be happy, in spite of everything, no matter what may happen — no matter what I may do.

FRANÇOISE. Even if you should deceive me?

MARCEL [*tenderly*]. Deceive you? Never! I care nothing about other women! You are my happiness — not a mere pastime.

FRANÇOISE. Alas!

MARCEL. Why alas?

FRANÇOISE. Because it is easier to do without happiness than pleasure.

MARCEL [*tenderly*]. Oh, you are all that is highest and best in my life. I prefer you to everything else! Let a woman come between us, and she shall have me to deal with! Call it selfishness, if you will, or egotism — but your peace of mind is an absolute necessity to me!

FRANÇOISE. You need not prepare me for the future, you bad boy: I resigned myself to "possibilities" some time ago. I'm inexperienced and young in years, but I'm older than you.

MARCEL. Shall I tell you something? I never deserved you!

FRANÇOISE. That's true.

MARCEL. When I think how happy you might have made some good and worthy man, and that —

FRANÇOISE. Who then would have made me happy?

MARCEL. You are not happy now.

FRANÇOISE. I didn't marry for happiness; I married in order to have you.

MARCEL. I'm a fool! It would be nice, wouldn't it, if I were an unfaithful husband!

FRANÇOISE. I'm sure you will never be that.

MARCEL. Do you really think so?

FRANÇOISE. I am positive. What would be the use in deceiving me? I should be so unhappy, and you wouldn't be a bit happier.

MARCEL. You are right.

FRANÇOISE. No, you will not deceive me. To begin with, I have great luck.

MARCEL [*gayly*]. Of course, you have; you don't know how much!

FRANÇOISE [*coquettishly*]. Tell me!

MARCEL. What a child you are!

MARCEL. I should think so! Sometimes I imagine that my happiness does not lie altogether in those sparkling eyes of yours, and I try to fall in love with another woman; I fall in deeper and deeper for a week or two, and think I am terribly infatuated. But just as I am about to take the fatal leap, I fail: Françoise' luck, you see! At bottom, I'm a commencer; I can't imagine what it is that saves me — and you. Sometimes *she* has done something to displease me, sometimes a divine word from your lips — and a mere nothing, something quite insignificant! For instance, Wednesday, I missed the train, and came back and had dinner with you. You see, Françoise' luck!

FRANÇOISE. Then you're not going out to-day, are you?

MARCEL. Nor to-morrow; the whole day is yours. We'll close the door.

FRANÇOISE. Aren't you happy?

MARCEL [*kissing her behind the ear*]. Hurry up, you lazy child!

FRANÇOISE. I'm not pretty, but I have my good points.

MARCEL. Not pretty?

FRANÇOISE. No, but I deserve to be.

[*Madeleine appears at the back.*]

MADELEINE. I beg your pardon!

[*Françoise gives an exclamation of surprise and escapes through the door to the right without looking again at the visitor.*]

MARCEL [*surprised*]. Madeleine!

[*A pause.*]

MADELEINE [*stylishly dressed. With an air of bravura*]. So this is the way you deceive me!

MARCEL [*gayly*]. My dear, if you think that during these three years —

MADELEINE. I beg your pardon for interrupting your little *tête-à-tête*, Marcel, but your door was open, and there was no servant to announce me.

MARCEL. You know you are always welcome here.

MADELEINE. Your wife is very attractive.

MARCEL. Isn't she? Shall I introduce you?

MADELEINE. Later — I've come to see *you*.

MARCEL. I must confess your visit is a little surprising.

MADELEINE. Especially after my sending that note this morning. I thought I should prefer not to trouble you.

MARCEL [*uncertain*]. Ah!

MADELEINE. Yes.

MARCEL. Well?

MADELEINE. Well, no!

MARCEL. I'm sorry. [*Kissing her*

hand.] Glad to see you, at any rate.

MADELEINE. Same studio as always, eh?

MARCEL. You are still as charming as ever.

MADELEINE. You are as handsome as ever.

MARCEL. I can say no less for you.

MADELEINE. I'm only twenty-eight.

MARCEL. But your husband is fifty: that keeps you young. How long have you been back?

MADELEINE. A week.

MARCEL. And I haven't seen Guérin yet!

MADELEINE. There's no hurry.

MARCEL. What's the matter?

MADELEINE. He's a bit worried: you know how jealous he is! Well, yesterday, when I was out, he went through all my private papers —

MARCEL. Naturally he came across some letters.

MADELEINE. *The* letters, my dear!

MARCEL. Mine?

MADELEINE. Yes. [*Gesture from Marcel.*] Old letters.

MARCEL. You kept them?

MADELEINE. From a celebrity? Of course!

MARCEL. The devil!

MADELEINE. Ungrateful!

MARCEL. I beg your pardon.

MADELEINE. You can imagine my explanation following the discovery. My dear Marcel, there's going to be a divorce.

MARCEL. A —! A divorce?

MADELEINE. Don't feel too sorry for me. After all, I shall be free and almost happy.

MARCEL. What resignation!

MADELEINE. Only —

MARCEL. Only what?

MADELEINE. He is going to send you his seconds.

MARCEL [*gayly*]. A duel? To-day? You're not serious?

MADELEINE. I think he wants to kill you.

MARCEL. But that affair was three years ago! Why, to begin with, he hasn't the right!

MADELEINE. Because it was so long ago?

MARCEL. Three years is three years.

MADELEINE. You're right: *now* you are not in love with his wife: you love your own. Time has changed everything. Now your own happiness is all-sufficient. I can easily understand your indignation against my husband.

MARCEL. Oh, I —

MADELEINE. My husband is slow, but he's sure, isn't he?

MARCEL. You're cruel, Madeleine.

MADELEINE. If it's ancient history for you, it's only too recent for him!

MARCEL. Let's not speak about him!

MADELEINE. But he ought to be a very interesting topic of conversation just now!

MARCEL. I hadn't foreseen his feeling so keenly.

MADELEINE. You must tell him how sorry you are when you see him.

MARCEL. At the duel?

MADELEINE. Elsewhere!

MARCEL. Where? Here, in my house?

MADELEINE. My dear, he may want to tell you how he feels.

[*A pause.*]

MARCEL [*aside, troubled*]. The devil! And Françoise? [*Another pause.*] Oh, a duel! Well, I ought to risk my life for you; you have done the same thing for me many times.

MADELEINE. Oh, I was not so careful as you were then.

MARCEL. You are not telling me everything, Madeleine. What put it into your husband's head to look through your papers?

MADELEINE. Ah!

MARCEL. Well, evidently *I* couldn't have excited his jealousy. For a long time he has had no reason to suspect me! Were they my letters he was looking for?

MADELEINE. That is my affair!

MARCEL. Then I am expiating for some one else?

MADELEINE. I'm afraid so.

MARCEL. Perfect!

MADELEINE. Forgive me!

MARCEL [*reproachfully*]. So you are deceiving him?

MADELEINE. You are a perfect friend to-day!

MARCEL. Then you really have a lover?

MADELEINE. A second lover! That would be disgraceful, wouldn't it?

MARCEL. The first step always brings the worst consequences.

MADELEINE. What are you smiling at?

MARCEL. Oh, the happiness of others! Well, let's have no bitterness.

MADELEINE. No, you might feel remorse!

MARCEL. Oh, Madeleine, why am I not the guilty one this time? You are always so beautiful!

MADELEINE. Your fault! You should have kept what you had!

MARCEL. I thought you were tired of me.

MADELEINE. You will never know what I suffered; I cried like an abandoned shopgirl!

MARCEL. Not for long, though?

MADELEINE. Three months. When I think I once loved you so much, and here I am before you so calm and indifferent! You look like anybody else now. How funny, how disgusting life is! You meet some one, do no end of foolish and wicked and mean things in order to belong to him, and the day comes when you don't know one another. Each takes his turn! I think it would have been better — [*Gesture from Marcel.*] Yes — I ought to try to forget everything.

MARCEL. That's all buried in the past! Wasn't it worth the trouble, and the suffering we have to undergo now?

MADELEINE. You, too? You have to recall —!

MARCEL. I'm sorry, but I didn't begin this conversation.

MADELEINE. Never mind! It's all over, let's say no more about it!

MARCEL. No, please! Let's — curse me, Madeleine, say anything you like about me: I deserve it all!

MADELEINE. Stop! Behave yourself, married man! What if your wife heard you!

MARCEL. She? Dear child! She is much too afraid of what I might say to listen.

MADELEINE. Dear child! You cynic! I'll wager you have not been a model husband since your marriage!

MARCEL. You are mistaken this time, my dear.

MADELEINE. You are lying!

MARCEL. Seriously; and I'm more surprised than you at the fact — but it's true.

MADELEINE. Poor Marcel!

MARCEL. I do suffer!

MADELEINE. Then you are a faithful husband?

MARCEL. I am frivolous and — compromising — that is all.

MADELEINE. It's rather funny: you seem somehow to be ready to belong to some one!

MARCEL. Madeleine, you are the first who has come near tempting me.

MADELEINE. Is it possible?

MARCEL. I feel myself weakening.

MADELEINE. Thank you so much for thinking of me, dear; I appreciate it, but for the time being, I'll — consider.

MARCEL. Have you made up your mind?

MADELEINE. We shall see later; I'll think it over — perhaps! Yet, I rather doubt if —. You haven't been nice to me to-day, your open honest face hasn't pleased me at all. You're so carelessly dressed! I don't think you're interesting any more. No, I hardly think so!

MARCEL. But, Madeleine —

MADELEINE. Don't call be Madeleine.

MARCEL. Madame Guérin! Madame Guérin! if I told you how much your note meant to me! How excited I was! I trembled when I read it!

MADELEINE. I'll warrant you read it before your wife?

MARCEL. It was so charming of you!

MADELEINE. How depraved you are!

MARCEL. How well you know me!

MADELEINE. Fool!

MARCEL. I adore you!

MADELEINE. That's merely a notion of yours! You imagine, since you haven't seen me for so long — I've just come back from a long trip!

MARCEL. Don't shake my faith in you!

MADELEINE. Think of your duties, my dear; don't forget —

MARCEL. My children? I have none.

MADELEINE. Your wife.

MARCEL [*in desperation*]. You always speak of her!

MADELEINE. Love her, my friend, and if my husband doesn't kill you to-morrow, continue to love her in peace and quiet. You are made for a virtuous life now — any one can see that. I flatter you when I consider you a libertine. You've been spoiled by too much happiness, that's the trouble with you!

MARCEL [*trying to kiss her*]. Madeleine, if you only — !

MADELEINE [*evading him*]. Are you out of your wits?

MARCEL. Forgive me: I haven't quite forgotten! Well, if I am killed it will be for a good reason.

MADELEINE. Poor dear!

MARCEL. It will! This duel is going to compromise you fearfully. Come now, every one will accuse you to-morrow; what difference does it make to you?

MADELEINE. I'm not in the mood!

MARCEL. Now *you* are lying!

MADELEINE. I don't love you.

MARCEL. Nonsense! You're sulking!

MADELEINE. How childish! Don't touch me! You want me to be unfaithful to everybody! Never! [*Changing.*] Yet — ! No; it would be too foolish! Good-by.

MARCEL [*kissing her as she tries to pass him*]. Not before —

MADELEINE. Oh, you've mussed my hat; how awkward of you! [*Trying to escape from Marcel's embrace.*] Let me go!

MARCEL [*jokingly*]. Let you go? In a few days!

MADELEINE. Good-by. My husband may come any moment.

MARCEL. Are you afraid?

MADELEINE. Yes, I'm afraid he might forgive me!

MARCEL. One minute more!

MADELEINE. No! I have just time. I'm going away this evening —

MARCEL. Going away?

MADELEINE. To London.

MARCEL. With — *him,* the other?

MADELEINE. I hope so.

MARCEL. Who knows? He may be waiting for you this moment at Madame de Montglat's, your aunt's —

MADELEINE. They are playing cards together.

MARCEL. The way we are! What a family!

MADELEINE. Impudent!

MARCEL. That's why you came.

MADELEINE [*about to leave*]. Shall I go out through the models' door, as I used to?

MARCEL. If I were still a bachelor you wouldn't leave me this way! You would miss your train this evening, I'll tell you that!

MADELEINE. You may very well look at that long sofa! No, no, my dear: not to-day, thanks!

MARCEL. In an hour, then, at Madame de Montglat's!

MADELEINE. Take care, or I'll make you meet your successor!

MARCEL. Then I can see whether you are still a woman of taste.

MADELEINE. Ah, men are very — I'll say the word after I leave. [*She goes out through the little door.*]

MARCEL [*alone*]. "Men are very — !" If we were, the women would have a very stupid time of it!

[*He is about to follow Madeleine.*]

[*Enter Françoise.*]

FRANÇOISE. Who was that stylish looking woman who just left, Marcel?

MARCEL [*embarrassed*]. Madame Jackson, my American friend.

FRANÇOISE. Well?

MARCEL. My picture? Sold!

FRANÇOISE. Ten thousand? Splendid! Don't you think so? You don't seem very happy!

MARCEL. The idea!

[*He picks up his hat.*]

FRANÇOISE [*jealously*]. Are you going to leave me?

MARCEL. I am just going to Goupil's and tell him.

FRANÇOISE. Then I'll have to lunch all by myself! [*Marcel stops an instant before the mirror.*] You look lovely.

MARCEL [*turning round*]. I —

FRANÇOISE. Oh, you'll succeed!

[*A pause.*]

MARCEL [*enchanted, in spite of himself*]. What can you be thinking of! [*Aside.*] What if she were after all my happiness? [*Reproachfully.*] Now, Françoise —

FRANÇOISE. I was only joking.

MARCEL [*ready to leave*]. No moping, remember? I can't have that!

FRANÇOISE. I know!

MARCEL [*tenderly. He stands at the threshold. Aside*]. Poor child! Well I *may* fail!

[*He goes out, left.*]

FRANÇOISE [*sadly*]. Where is he going? Probably to a rendezvous. Oh, if he is! Will my luck fail me to-day? Soon he'll come back again, so well satisfied with himself! I talk to him so much about my resignation, I wonder

whether he believes in it? Why must I be tormented this way forever?

[*Enter Jean, with a visiting-card.*]

JEAN. Is Monsieur here?

FRANÇOISE. Let me see!

[*She takes the card.*]

JEAN. The gentleman is waiting, Madame.

FRANÇOISE. Ask him to come in. Quick, now!

[*Jean goes out.*]

[*Enter Guérin, at the back. As he sees Françoise he hesitates before coming to her.*]

FRANÇOISE [*cordially*]. Come in, Monsieur. I have never seen you, but I already know you very well.

GUÉRIN [*a large, strong man, with grayish hair*]. Thank you, Madame. I thought I should find Monsieur Desroches at home. If you will excuse me —

FRANÇOISE. I beg you!

GUÉRIN. I fear I am intruding: it's so early.

FRANÇOISE. You intruding in Marcel's home?

GUÉRIN. Madame —

FRANÇOISE. My husband will return soon, Monsieur.

GUÉRIN [*brightening*]. Good!

FRANÇOISE. Will you wait for him here in the studio?

GUÉRIN [*advancing*]. Really, Madame, it would be most ungrateful of me to refuse your kindness.

FRANÇOISE. Here are magazines and newspapers — I shall ask to be excused. [*As she is about to leave.*] It was rather difficult to make you stay!

GUÉRIN. Forgive me, Madame. [*Aside ironically.*] Too bad! She's decidedly charming!

[*Having gone up-stage, Françoise suddenly returns.*]

FRANÇOISE. It seems a little strange to you, Monsieur — doesn't it? — to see a woman in this bachelor studio — quite at home?

GUÉRIN. Why, Madame —

FRANÇOISE. Before leaving you — which I shall do in a moment — you must know that there is one woman who is very glad to know you have returned to Paris!

GUÉRIN. We just arrived this week.

FRANÇOISE. Good!

GUÉRIN [*ironically*]. It's so long since I've seen Marcel.

FRANÇOISE. Three years.

GUÉRIN. So many things have happened since!

FRANÇOISE. You find him a married man, for one thing —

GUÉRIN. Happily married!

FRANÇOISE. Yes, happily!

GUÉRIN. Dear old Marcel! I'll be so glad to see him!

FRANÇOISE. I see you haven't forgotten my husband, Monsieur. Thank you!

GUÉRIN. How can I help admiring so stout and loyal a heart as his!

FRANÇOISE. You'll have to like me, too!

GUÉRIN. I already do.

FRANÇOISE. Really? Then you believe everything you write?

GUÉRIN. Yes, Madame.

FRANÇOISE. Take care! This morning I was re-reading one of your letters, in which you promised me your heartiest support. [*Offering him her hand.*] Then we're friends, are we not?

GUÉRIN [*after hesitating, takes her hand*]. Good friends, Madame!

FRANÇOISE. Word of honor?

GUÉRIN. Word of honor!

FRANÇOISE [*sitting*]. Then I'll stay. Sit down, and let's talk. [*Guérin is uncertain.*] We have so much to say to each other! Let's talk about you first.

GUÉRIN [*forced to sit down*]. About me? But I —

FRANÇOISE. Yes, about you.

GUÉRIN [*quickly*]. No, about *your* happiness, your welfare.

FRANÇOISE. About my great happiness!

GUÉRIN [*ironically*]. Let us speak about your — existence — with which you are so content. I must know all the happiness of this house!

FRANÇOISE. Happy people never have anything to say.

GUÉRIN. You never have troubles, I presume?

FRANÇOISE. None, so far.

GUÉRIN. But what might happen? To-day you are living peacefully with Marcel, a man whose marriage was, it seems, strongly opposed. Life owes you no more than it has already given you.

FRANÇOISE. My happiness is complete. I had never imagined that a

man's goodness could make a woman so happy!

GUÉRIN. Goodness?

FRANÇOISE. Of course!

GUÉRIN. Love, you mean Madame!

FRANÇOISE. Oh, Marcel's love for me — !

GUÉRIN. Something lacking?

FRANÇOISE. No!

GUÉRIN [*interested*]. Tell me. Am I not your friend?

FRANÇOISE. Seriously, Monsieur, you know him very well: how could he be in love with me? Is it even possible? He allows one to love him, and I ask nothing more.

GUÉRIN. Nothing?

FRANÇOISE. Only to be allowed to continue. [*Gesture from Guérin.*] I am not like other women. I don't ask for rights; but I do demand tenderness, and consideration. He is free, I am not — I'll admit that. But I don't mind, I only hope that we may continue as we are!

GUÉRIN. Have you some presentiment, Madame?

FRANÇOISE. I am afraid, Monsieur. My happiness is not of the proud, demonstrative variety, it is a kind of happiness that is continually trembling for its safety. If I told you —

GUÉRIN. Do tell me!

FRANÇOISE. Later! How I pity any one who loves and has to suffer for it!

GUÉRIN [*surprised*]. You — !

FRANÇOISE. I am not on the side of the jealous, of the betrayed —

GUÉRIN [*aside, sympathetically*]. Poor little woman! [*With great sincerity.*] Then you are not sure of him?

FRANÇOISE [*more and more excited*]. He is Marcel! Admit for a moment that he loves me to-day — I want so to believe it! To-morrow will he love me? Does he himself know whether he will love me then? Isn't he at the mercy of a whim, a passing fancy — of the weather, or the appearance of the first woman he happens to meet? I am only twenty, and I am not always as careful as I might be. Happiness is so difficult!

GUÉRIN. Yes, it is. [*To himself.*] It is! [*To Françoise.*] Perhaps you are conscientious, too sincere?

FRANÇOISE. I feel that; yes, I think I am, but every time I try to hide my affection from him, he becomes indifferent, almost mean — as if he were glad to be relieved of a duty — of being good!

GUÉRIN. So it's come to that!

FRANÇOISE. You see, Marcel can't get used to the idea that his other life is over, dead and buried, that he's married for good — that he must do as others do. I do my best and tell him, but my very presence only reminds him of his duties as a husband. For instance [*interrupting herself*]. Here I am telling you all this —

GUÉRIN. Oh! — Please.

FRANÇOISE [*bitterly*]. He likes to go out alone at night, without me. He knows me well enough to understand that his being away makes me very unhappy, and as a matter of form, of common courtesy, he asks me to go with him. I try to reason and convince myself that he doesn't mean what he says, but I can't help feeling sincerely happy when once in a while I do accept his invitation. But the moment we leave the house I realize my mistake. Then he pretends to be in high spirits, but I know all the time he is acting a part; and when we come home again he lets drop without fail some hint about having lost his liberty; he says he took me out in a moment of weakness, that he really wanted to be alone.

GUÉRIN [*interrupting*]. And when he does go out alone?

FRANÇOISE. Then I am most unhappy; I'm in torment for hours and hours. I wonder where he can be, and then I'm afraid he won't come back at all. When the door opens, when I hear him come in, I'm so happy I pay no attention to what he tells me. But I made a solemn vow never to show the least sign of jealousy. My face is always tranquil, and what I say to him never betrays what I feel. I never knowingly betray myself, but his taking way, his tenderness, soon make me confess every fear; then he turns round and, using my own confession as a weapon, shows me how wrong I am to be afraid and suspicious. And when sometimes I say nothing to him, even when he tries to make me confess, he punishes me most severely by telling me stories of his affairs, narrow escapes, and all his temptations. He once told me about an old mistress of his, whom

he had just seen, a very clever woman, who was never jealous! Or else he comes in so late that I must be glad, for if he came in later, it would have been all night! He tells me he had some splendid opportunity, and had to give it up! A thousand things like that! He seems to delight in making me suspect and doubt him!

GUÉRIN. Poor little woman!

FRANÇOISE. That's my life; as for my happiness, it exists from day to day. [*With determination.*] If I only had the right to be unhappy! But I must always smile, I must be happy, not only in his presence, but to the very depths of my soul! So that he may deceive me without the least remorse! It is his pleasure!

[*She bursts into tears.*]

GUÉRIN [*rising*]. The selfish brute!

FRANÇOISE. Isn't my suffering a reproach to him?

GUÉRIN. I pity you, Madame, and I think I understand you better than any one else. I have trouble not unlike your own; perhaps greater, troubles for which there is no consolation.

FRANÇOISE. If you understand me, Monsieur, advise me! I need you!

GUÉRIN [*startled back into reality*]. Me, help you? I? [*Aside.*] No!

FRANÇOISE. You spoke of your friendship. The time has come, prove that it is genuine!

GUÉRIN. Madame, why did I ever see you? Why did I listen to you?

FRANÇOISE. What have you to regret?

GUÉRIN. Nothing, Madame, nothing.

FRANÇOISE. Explain yourself, Monsieur. You — you make me afraid!

GUÉRIN [*trying to calm her suspicions*]. Don't cry like that! There is no reason why you should behave that way! Your husband doesn't love you as he ought, but he does love you. You are jealous, that's what's troubling you. But for that matter, why should he deceive you? That would be too unjust.

FRANÇOISE [*excited*]. Too unjust! You are right, Monsieur! No matter how cynical, how blasé a man may be, isn't it his duty, his sacred duty, to say to himself, "I have found a good and true woman in this world of deceptions; she is a woman who adores me, who is only too ready to invent any excuse for me! She bears my name and honors it; no matter what I do, she is always true, of that I am positive. I am always foremost in her thoughts, and I shall be her only love." When a man can say all that, Monsieur, isn't that real, true happiness?

GUÉRIN [*sobbing*]. Yes — that is happiness!

FRANÇOISE. You are crying! [*A pause.*]

GUÉRIN. My wife — deceived me!

FRANÇOISE. Oh! [*A pause.*] Marcel —

GUÉRIN. Your happiness is in no danger! Yesterday I found some old letters, in a desk — old letters — that was all! You weren't his wife at the time. It's ancient history.

FRANÇOISE [*aside*]. Who knows?

GUÉRIN. Forgive me, Madame; your troubles remind me of my own. When you told of the happiness you still have to give, I couldn't help thinking of what I had lost!

FRANÇOISE. So you have come to fight a duel with my husband?

GUÉRIN. Madame —

FRANÇOISE. You are going to fight him? Answer me.

GUÉRIN. My life is a wreck now — I must —

FRANÇOISE. I don't ask you to forget; Monsieur —

GUÉRIN. Don't you think I have a right?

FRANÇOISE. Stop!

GUÉRIN. I shall not try to kill him. You love him too much! I couldn't do it now. In striking him I should be injuring you, and you don't deserve to suffer; you have betrayed no one. The happiness you have just taught me to know is as sacred and inviolable as my honor, my unhappiness. I shall not seek revenge.

FRANÇOISE [*gratefully*]. Oh, Monsieur.

GUÉRIN. I am willing he should live, because he is so dear, so necessary to you. Keep him. If he wants to spoil your happiness, his be the blame! I shall not do it. It would be sacrilege. Good-by, Madame, good-by.

[*Guérin goes out, back, Françoise falls into a chair, sobbing.*]

[*Enter Marcel by the little door.*]

MARCEL [*aside, with a melancholy air*]. Refused to see me!

FRANÇOISE [*distinctly*]. Oh, it's you!

MARCEL [*good-humoredly*]. Yes, it's I. [*A pause. He goes toward her.*] You have been crying! Have you seen Guérin? He's been here!

FRANÇOISE. Marcel!

MARCEL. Did he dare tell you!

FRANÇOISE. You won't see any more of him.

MARCEL [*astounded*]. He's not going to fight?

FRANÇOISE. He refuses.

MARCEL. Thank you!

FRANÇOISE. I took good care of your dignity, you may be sure of that. Here we were together; I told him the story of my life during the last year — how I loved you — and then he broke down. When I learned the truth, he said he would go away for my happiness' sake.

MARCEL. I was a coward to deceive that man! Is this a final sentence that you pass on me?

FRANÇOISE. Marcel!

MARCEL. Both of you are big! You have big hearts. I admire you both more than I can say.

FRANÇOISE [*incredulously*]. Where are you going? To get him to fight with you?

MARCEL [*returning to her; angrily*]. How can I, now? After what you have done, it would be absurd. Why the devil did you have to mix yourself up in something that doesn't concern you? I was only looking for a chance to fight that duel!

FRANÇOISE. Looking for a chance?

MARCEL. Oh, I —

FRANÇOISE. Why?

MARCEL [*between his teeth*]. That's my affair! Everybody has his enemies — his insults to avenge. It was a very good thing that gentleman didn't happen across my path!

FRANÇOISE. How dare you recall what he has been generous enough to forget?

MARCEL. How do you know that I haven't a special reason for fighting this duel? A legitimate reason, that must be concealed from you?

FRANÇOISE. You are mistaken, dear; I guess that reason perfectly.

MARCEL. Really?

FRANÇOISE. I know it.

MARCEL [*bursting forth*]. Oh! Good! You haven't always been so frightfully profound.

FRANÇOISE. Yes, I have, and your irony only proves that I have not been so much mistaken in what I felt by intuition.

MARCEL. Ah, marriage.

FRANÇOISE. Ah, duty!

MARCEL. I love Madame Guérin, don't I?

FRANÇOISE. I don't say that.

MARCEL. You think it.

FRANÇOISE. And if I do? Would it be a crime to think it? You once loved her — perhaps you have seen her again, recently? Do I know where you go? You never tell me.

MARCEL. I tell you too much!

FRANÇOISE. I think you do.

MARCEL. You're jealous!

FRANÇOISE. Common, if you like. Come, you must admit, Marcel, Madame Guérin is in some way responsible for your excitement now?

MARCEL. Very well then, I love her, I adore her! Are you satisfied?

FRANÇOISE. You should have told me that first, my dear; I should never have tried to keep you away from her.

[*She breaks into tears.*]

MARCEL. She's crying! Good, there's liberty for you!

FRANÇOISE [*bitterly*]. Liberty? I did not suffer when I promised you your liberty.

MARCEL. That was your "resignation."

FRANÇOISE. You knew life, I did not. You ought never to have accepted it!

MARCEL. You're like all the rest!

FRANÇOISE [*more excited*]. Doesn't unhappiness level us all?

MARCEL. I see it does!

FRANÇOISE. What can you ask for, then? So long as you have no great happiness like mine you are ready enough to make any sacrifice, but when once you have it, you never resign yourself to losing it.

MARCEL. That's just the difficulty.

FRANÇOISE. Be a little patient, dear: I have not yet reached that state of cynicism and subtlety which you seem to want in your wife — I thought I came near to your ideal once! Perhaps there's some hope for me yet; I have promised

myself to do my best to satisfy your ideal.

MARCEL [*moved*]. I don't ask that.

FRANÇOISE. You are right, I am very foolish to try to struggle. What is the good? It will suffice when I have lost the dearest creature on earth — through my foolishness, my blunders!

MARCEL. The dearest creature?

FRANÇOISE. I can't help it if he seems so to me!

MARCEL [*disarmed*]. You — you're trying to appeal to my vanity!

FRANÇOISE. I am hardly in the mood for joking.

MARCEL [*tenderly, as he kneels at her feet*]. But you make me say things like that — I don't now what! I am not bad — really bad! No, I have not deceived you! I love you, and only you! You! You know that, Françoise! Ask — ask any woman! All women!

[*A pause.*]

FRANÇOISE [*smiling through her tears*]. Best of husbands! You're not going out then? You'll stay?

MARCEL [*in Françoise's arms*]. Can I go now, now that I'm here? You are so pretty that I —

FRANÇOISE. Not when I'm in trouble.

MARCEL. Don't cry!

FRANÇOISE. I forgive you!

MARCEL. Wait, I haven't confessed everything.

FRANÇOISE. Not another word!

MARCEL. I want to be sincere.

FRANÇOISE. I prefer you to lie to me!

MARCEL. First, read this note — the one I received this morning.

FRANÇOISE [*surprised*]. From Madame Guérin?

MARCEL. You saw her not long ago. Yes, she calmly told me —

FRANÇOISE. That her husband had found some letters!

MARCEL. And that she was about to leave for England with her lover.

FRANÇOISE. Then she is quite consoled?

MARCEL. Perfectly.

FRANÇOISE. Poor Marcel! And you want to see her and try to prevent her going away with him?

MARCEL. My foolishness was well punished. She wouldn't receive me.

FRANÇOISE. Then I am the only one left who loves you? How happy I am!

MARCEL. I'll kill that love some day with my ridiculous philandering!

FRANÇOISE [*gravely*]. I defy you!

MARCEL [*playfully*]. Then I no longer have the right to provoke Monsieur Guérin? Now?

FRANÇOISE [*gayly*]. You are growing old, Lovelace, his wife has deceived you!

MARCEL [*lovingly*]. Françoise' luck! [*Sadly.*] Married!

[*Curtain.*]

ALTRUISM

A Satire

By Karl Ettlinger

Translated by Benjamin F. Glazer.

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The first performance of ALTRUISM was given by The Stage Society of Philadelphia at the Little Theatre, Philadelphia, on January 28, 1916, with the following cast:

A BEGGAR	*Henry C. Sheppard*
A WAITER	*E. Ryland Carter*
A YOUNG MAN	*William H. McClure*
A COCOTTE	*Sylvia Loeb.*
A PARISIAN	*Edward B. Latimer*
HIS WIFE	*Florence Bernstein*
THEIR CHILD	*Jean Massey*
AN ARTIST	*Theron J. Bamberger*
AN AMERICAN	*William J. Holt*
A GENTLEMAN	*Caspar W. Briggs*
ANOTHER GENTLEMAN	*Norris W. Corey*
A PICKPOCKET	*Walter E. Endy*
A GENDARME	*William H. Russell*
ANOTHER GENDARME	*Frederick Cowperthwaite*
A WORKINGMAN	*Walter D. Dalsimer*
A FLOWER GIRL	*Katherine Kennedy*
A PASSING LADY	*C. Warren Briggs*
A BYSTANDER	*Charles E. Sommer*
AN OLD LADY	*Paulyne Brinkman*
A GRISETTE	*Florence M. Lyman*

[TIME: *The present.* PLACE: A Parisian Café by the Seine.]

Produced under the direction of Benjamin F. Glazer. Scene designed by H. Devitt Welsh. Costumes designed by Martha G. Speiser.

CHARACTERS

A BEGGAR
A TOWNSMAN
A TOWNSWOMAN
THEIR SEVEN-YEAR-OLD SON
AN ARTIST
AN AMERICAN
A COCOTTE
A WAITER
A WORKINGMAN
A YOUNG MAN
TWO OFFICERS
THE CROWD

PLACE: *Paris.*
TIME: *Present.*
On the banks of the Seine.

The play was later produced by the Washington Square Players, at the Comedy Theatre, New York City. The professional and amateur stage rights are reserved by the translator, Mr. Benjamin F. Glazer, Editorial Department, *The Press,* Philadelphia, Pa., to whom all requests for permission to produce the play should be made.

ALTRUISM

A Satire

By Karl Ettlinger

[*In the background the end of a pier. On a post hangs a rope and a life buoy. Close by the Beggar is sitting on the floor. At right a street café; two tables stand under the open sky on the street. At one of the tables sits the Waiter, reading a newspaper. At the other sits the Cocotte and the blond Young Man. At left on a public bench sits the Artist. He has a sketch book and pencil with which he is drawing the Cocotte, who has noticed it and is flirting with him.*]

[*Lady xes from Left to Right.*]
[*Man xes from Right to Left.*]

Beggar [*sings*]:

Kind sir, have pity while you can,
Remember the old beggar man.
The poor beggar man.

Waiter [*sitting at table, R. C., looks up from his newspaper*]. Shut up!

Beggar. Don't get fresh! I was once a *head* waiter!

Waiter. That must have been a fine place.

Beggar. It was too. I traveled all around the world as a waiter. I saw better days before I became a beggar.

Young Man [*at table Left, fondly to the Cocotte*]. Indeed if I were a millionaire — my word of honor I would buy you an automobile. Nothing would be too dear for you.

Cocotte [*at table Left*]. My darling Kangaroo. How liberal you are. I am sure I am your first love.

Young Man. Yes — you are — that is if I don't count the cook who has been at our house for five years — yes, on my word of honor.

[*He finishes in pantomime.*]

Beggar [*to Waiter*]: Yes, yes, one goes down. Life is a tight rope dance — before you look around you've lost your balance, and are lying in the dirt.

Waiter [*laying aside the paper*]. You ought to go to work. That would do you more good than talking.

Beggar. I've tried working too. But work for our kind is the surest way to remain poor. And, do you know, begging is no pleasure either. To get the money centime by centime and no rest from the police — well, well, if I'm born into this world again I will become a government official.

[*A man passes. Enter lady from Left. Stops lady Center. Sings and holds out his hat.*]

The rich man in his banquet hall,
Has everything I long for!
The poor man gets the scraps that fall;
That's what I sing this song for.
Kind sir, have pity while you can —

[*Man exit Left.*]

Do you see? he doesn't give me anything! (Social enlightenment ends with the lower classes. That is where need is greatest and the police are thickest.)

Young Man [*to the* Cocotte]. I would buy you a flying machine too, but you shouldn't fly alone in it — Ah, to soar with you a thousand meters above the earth — and far and wide nothing — only you and our love —

Cocotte. What a wonderful boy you are.

[*She flirts with the Artist.*]

Beggar. How often have I wanted to commit suicide. But why should I gratify my fellow man by doing that? — suicide is the one sin I can see nothing funny in. I always say to myself, so long as there's a jail one can never starve.

Waiter. You have no dignity.

Beggar. No. My dignity was taken away from me ten years ago by the law. But I'm not so sure I want it back.

Waiter [*in disgust*]. I ought to call the cops and have them drive you away from here.

Beggar [*confidentially*]. You wouldn't

do that. Only yesterday I paid my colleagues 20 francs for this place. [*Searches in his pockets.*] Here is a receipt. I won't go away from here unless the police carry me away in their arms. The police seem to be the only people who make a fuss over me these days. [*Laughs.*]

WAITER. Disgusting old beggar. Why on earth such people — [*The rest is lost in his teeth.*]

[*The Townsman, the Townswoman, and their child enter. The Townsman carries the child on his shoulder and is perspiring from the exertion.*]

[*Waiter X to Right of Table. Beggar goes up stage Center.*]

TOWNSWOMAN [*center Left with boy; sighs*]. That is all I have to say, just let me come to that. Just let me come to it. On the spot I'll get a divorce.

TOWNSMAN [*following her*]. Give me your word of honor on it.

TOWNSWOMAN. Now I know what they mean when they say that all men were polygamists.

TOWNSMAN. Calm yourself, old woman. It's all theoretical that married women are good cooks and married men are polygamists.

BEGGAR.

The rich man in his banquet hall
Has everything I long for!
The poor . . .

TOWNSMAN. Let him banquet in peace.

[*They sit at the table from which the Waiter has just risen.*]

CHILD. I want to give the poor man something. Papa! Money! Papa! Money!

TOWNSWOMAN [*kisses child*]. A heart of gold has my little Phillip. A disposition like butter. He gets that from me.

TOWNSMAN. What? Asking for money or the oleo margerine disposition?

CHILD. When I give the poor man something he makes a funny face and I have to laugh. Papa, money!

TOWNSMAN. Since I've been married I make all kinds of faces, but no one gives me anything. [*Searches in his pocket book.*] Too bad, I've nothing smaller than a centime piece.

TOWNSWOMAN. Of course, you'd rather bring up our Phillip to have a heart of stone. Children should be taught to love people. They must be brought up in that way — to have regard and respect for the most unfortunate fellow beings — How that woman is perfumed. Women like that shouldn't be permitted in the city.

YOUNG MAN [*to the Cocotte*]. I would buy you two beautiful air ships, a half moon for week days and a star for Sundays. All my millions I would lay at your feet. [*Raising his hand.*] Waiter — another glass of water, please.

COCOTTE. I'd like to kiss you, my little wild horse.

[*Waiter dusts table, Right Center. Flirts with the Artist.*]

[*Child, Man and Wife sit at table Right Center.*]

WAITER [*to the Townsman*]. What can I bring you?

TOWNSWOMAN. For the child, a glass of milk, but be sure it's well cooked. [*To the Child.*] A little glass of good ninni for my darling, a glass of ninni from the big moo cow.

TOWNSMAN [*mocking her*]. And for me a glass of red wine — a little glass of good red wine for the big moo-ox.

TOWNSWOMAN [*angry*]. That's just like you. Begrudge a glass of milk to your own child — naturally — so long as you have your cigar and your wine —

TOWNSMAN. My dear, I hereby give little Phillip permission to drink three cows dry. And of my next week's wages, you may buy him a whole herd of cows.

CHILD. I want chocolate! Chocolate, mama!

TOWNSMAN. You shall have it. As much as you want. Wouldn't you perhaps like to have a glass of champagne, little Phillip, and a Henry Clay cigar and a salad made of a big moo-chicken?

YOUNG MAN [*getting up, x to Center. Jumps up and runs to the Artist*]. Sir! Sir! This is unheard of. You've been drawing this lady all the time. She is a respectable lady, do you understand? For all you know she may be my wife.

ARTIST [*phlegmatically*]. More than that — for all I know she may be your mother.

YOUNG MAN [*stammering*]. My dear sir — I must call you to account — what do you mean by —

ARTIST. Why are you so excited? Isn't it a good likeness?

YOUNG MAN [*confused*]. Of course, it's a good likeness, that is — I ask you, sir, how dare you to draw a picture of my bride?

TOWNSWOMAN. These young people are quarreling. You always bring me to places like this. We can never go out together but there's a scandal.

COCOTTE [*who has drawn near and is examining the drawing*]. I like that. I'd like to own the drawing.

ARTIST. My dear lady, if it would give you any pleasure . . .

COCOTTE. I couldn't think of taking it. [*To the boy.*] Buy me the picture. Sweetheart, will you buy it for me?

YOUNG MAN. I don't think much of it. You are far, far prettier.

COCOTTE. You won't refuse me this one little request. How much do you ask for the picture?

ARTIST. I hadn't thought of selling it — but because it is such a good likeness of you, ten francs. But you must promise that in return you will sit for me again — [*With emphasis.*] perhaps at my studio. To-morrow at noon?

COCOTTE. Gladly! Very gladly! [*The young man pays for the sketch.*] Would you care to sit down and have something with us?

ARTIST. If your fiancé doesn't object?

YOUNG MAN [*coldly*]. Charmed! [*The three sit.*]

THE CHILD. The chocolate is no good. I want some moo milk.

TOWNSMAN. In a minute, I'll take my moo stick and tan your moo hide.

AMERICAN. [*Enters leading a dog on a leash.*] [*From Left x Center.*]

BEGGAR [*sings*].

The rich man his banquet hall
Has everything I long for,
The poor man gets the crumbs that fall,
That's what I sing this song for.
Kind sir, have pity while you can,
Remember the old beggar man,
The poor beggar man.

AMERICAN. [*Has listened to the entire song impassively.*] Are you through? Waiter, put a muzzle on this man. [*x to Table Right.*]

TOWNSWOMAN. That is what I call an elegant man. I have always wanted you to have a suit made like that. Ask him where he got it and what it cost.

TOWNSMAN. I couldn't ask an utter stranger what his clothes cost.

TOWNSWOMAN. Of course not, but if it was a woman you would have been over there long ago.

CHILD. Mama, the bow-wow dog is biting me.

TOWNSWOMAN. My dear sir, your dog is biting my son.

AMERICAN. You're mistaken, madame. My dog has been carefully trained to eat none other than boiled meat.

ARTIST [*to the Young Man*]. Pardon me for asking — but is the lady your wife or your fiancé?

AMERICAN [*sits, puts his legs on the two extra chairs*]. Waiter! Garçon! Bring me a quart of Cliquot, and bring my dog a menu card.

[*At the word "Cliquot" the Cocotte looks up and begins to flirt with the American.*]

CHILD. The bow-wow dog is making faces at me.

TOWNSWOMAN. Look here, sir, your dog is certainly about to bite my child.

AMERICAN [*lights his pipe*]. How much does your child cost?

TOWNSWOMAN. Cost! My child! Did you ever hear of such a thing? I want you to understand that my child p —

AMERICAN. Waiter! Tell this woman not to shout so! — How much does your child cost?

TOWNSWOMAN. My child costs — nothing! Do you understand?

AMERICAN. Well, your child costs nothing — my dog costs eight dollars. Think that over — is your son a thoroughbred? My dog is of the purest breed — think that over — if your son hurts my dog I'll hold you responsible. Think that over. [*Fills his glass.*]

COCOTTE. What do you think that man to be, little mouse?

YOUNG MAN. A full blooded American.

ARTIST. I should say he's a German who has spent two weeks in New York.

TOWNSWOMAN. Aristide, are you going to sit there and permit your defenseless wife to be insulted like that?

TOWNSMAN. As long as you have your tongue, my dear, you are not defenseless.

TOWNSWOMAN. It is your business to talk to him. [*Kisses the Child.*] My

poor little Phillip! Your father is no man.

TOWNSMAN. I was before I got married. [*Crosses to the American.*] Sir, my name is Aristide Beaurepard.

AMERICAN. Is that my fault?

TOWNSMAN. I am the father of a family.

AMERICAN. I am very sorry for you, indeed.

TOWNSMAN. I have a wife and children —

AMERICAN. You have only yourself to blame.

TOWNSMAN. Your dog —

AMERICAN. I have no desire to discuss dogs with you. I don't believe you know anything about thoroughbred dogs. Waiter, sit this man down in his place.

TOWNSMAN. This is I must say, this is —

WAITER. Monsieur, you must not make a racket around you. This is a first class establishment. A real prince once dined here, I would have you understand. Come on now, if you please. [*Leads Townsman back to his seat.*]

TOWNSMAN [*sits unwillingly*]. Not a centime tip will that fellow get from me. Not a centime.

AMERICAN. Waiter, Waiter, bring my dog a portion of liver, and not too fat. And a roast potato.

BEGGAR. [*Coming down C.*] [*Jumps up, cries out widly.*] I can't stand any more. For eight days I have not had a warm morsel of food in my stomach. I am not a human being any more. I'll kill myself. [*Runs to the edge of the dock and jumps overboard.*] [*The splash of the water is heard. The Townswoman and the Waiter call "help, help!" Whereupon, from every side a crowd collects so that the entire background is filled with people staring into the water.*]

TOWNSWOMAN. For God's sake he has thrown himself into the Seine. Oh, God! Oh, God!

OMNES. He's in the river!

AMERICAN. [*At table Right.*] What a noisy place this is.

[*Townsman at center throws off his coat and is unbuttoning his vest when his wife seizes him.*]

TOWNSWOMAN. [*Center.*] [*Whimpering.*] Aristide, remember you have a wife and children.

TOWNSMAN. That is why I want to do it.

TOWNSWOMAN. Aristide, I'll jump in after you — as true as I live I'll jump in after you.

TOWNSMAN. [*Slowly puts his coat on again.*] Then I won't do it. [*Goes with her into the crowd.*]

A VOICE. Get the life buoy. [*Willing hands try to unloosen the life buoy, but it sticks.*]

ANOTHER VOICE. Let that life buoy alone. Don't you see the sign "Do not touch"?

A MAN. The buoy is no good. It will not work.

ANOTHER MAN. Of course not. It's city property.

COCOTTE [*shuddering*]. I can't look at it. [*Comes back to her table.*]

A WOMAN. Look! He's come up! Over there!

CHILD. I can't see.

TOWNSWOMAN. My little heart of gold [*to her husband*]. Why don't you lift him up? Don't you hear that the child can't see? [*Townsman takes the child on his shoulder.*]

YOUNG MAN [*coming back to table*]. These people are utterly heartless. It is revolting.

AMERICAN [*loudly*]. I'll bet twenty dollars he drowns. Who'll take the bet? Twenty dollars.

YOUNG MAN. Are you a man or a beast?

AMERICAN. Young man, better shut your mouth. [*Fills his glass.*]

YOUNG MAN. Does no one hear know the meaning of Altruism?

ARTIST. Altruism! Ha, ha! [*Laughs scornfully.*] Love of one's neighbor. God preserve mankind from Altruism!

COCOTTE. What do you mean? You are not in earnest?

ARTIST. In dead earnest. [*Some one in the crowd brings a boat hook and reaches down into the river.*]

AMERICAN. I'll bet twenty-five dollars that he doesn't drown — thirty dollars! [*Disgustedly, seeing that no one takes him up.*] Tightwads!

ARTIST. Life is like that. One man's success is another man's failure. He who sacrifices himself for an idea is a

hero. He who sacrifices himself for a fellow man is a fool.

YOUNG MAN [*theatrically*]. No, it is the highest, the noblest of instincts. That is why my heart bleeds when I see all these people stand indifferently by while a fellow man is drowning. No one jumps in after him —

AMERICAN. Jump in yourself, young man, jump in yourself.

YOUNG MAN [*center*]. It is different with me, I am with a lady — it wouldn't be right.

AMERICAN. Nobody will bet. This is a hell of a bunch. They ought to see one of our nigger lynchings. [*Strokes the dog.*] Poor Molly! She is so nervous. Things like this get her all excited.

[*Two Policemen enter.*]

FIRST POLICEMAN. Look at the mob. Something is liable to happen there.

SECOND POLICEMAN. Isn't it forbidden for such a mob to gather on the dock?

FIRST POLICEMAN. Sure, it's against the law. Why shouldn't it be?

SECOND POLICEMAN [*shaking their heads*]. This is no place for us. [*Exit Left.*]

ARTIST [*to the Young Man*]. Does it begin to dawn on you that true love of one's neighbor would not only be monotonous but unbearable as well.

YOUNG MAN. Out there a man is drowning — and you stand there moralizing.

ARTIST. Why not? We read a dozen suicides every day. [*x to Chair Left.*] Yet we go home and eat our dinner with undiminished relish. Why then sentimentalize over a drowning beggar? I wouldn't rescue a man who had fallen into the water much less one who had jumped in.

YOUNG MAN [*passionately*]. Sir — I despise you! [*Goes into the crowd.*]

[*A man has succeeded in prying up the life buoy, now he throws it into the water with the warning cry "Look out."*]

ARTIST. Love of one's neighbor is a mask. A mask that people wear to hide from themselves their real faces.

AMERICAN [*x to Artist Left*]. No, I don't agree with you. I am strong for love of one's neighbor. Indeed, the Bible tells us to love our neighbor as ourselves. Oh, I am very strong for it. I go to Church on Sundays in the U. S. A. I never touch a drop — in the U. S. A.

VOICE. The life buoy is sinking.

ANOTHER VOICE. That's why they call it a *life buoy*. [*Laughter.*]

COCOTTE [*sympathetically*]. How interestingly you talk. I love Americans.

AMERICAN. We have two kinds of neighborly love back home. Neighborly love that makes for entertaining and dancing, and neighborly love that you read about next day in the newspapers.

OMNES [*Workingman who has just entered.*] [*Right.*] What's the matter here? [*Elbows his way through the crowd.*] Make way there! Let me through! [*Throws off coat, tightens his belt, spits in his hand and jumps into the water.*] [*Great excitement.*]

YOUNG MAN [*center*]. [*Ecstatically.*] A hero! A hero!

AMERICAN [*loudly but indifferently*]. I'll bet sixty dollars that both of them drown! — Seventy! Seventy-five! [*Contemptuously.*] I can't get a bet around here. I'm going back to America.

[*The Artist goes into the crowd.*]

COCOTTE [*at table Left, alone with American*]. Going back so soon?

AMERICAN. As soon as I have seen Paris. Wouldn't you like to show me the town? I'll meet you to-morrow at four in front of the Opera House.

COCOTTE. I'll be there. I like Americans.

THE MOB [*cheering*]. He's got him! Hurrah! [*The pole is outstretched.*]

AMERICAN. I'd like to know how much longer that waiter means to keep my dog waiting for her order of liver. [*x to table Right.*]

YOUNG MAN [*comes down to table, joyfully*]. He is saved; thank God he is saved. Weren't you sorry at all when that poor wretch jumped into the river?

AMERICAN. Young man, is it my river?

THE MOB [*cheering again*]. Hurrah! [*Great excitement.*]

[*The Workingman and the Beggar are dragged dripping out of the water. They help the Beggar to a chair.*]

WORKINGMAN [*center*]. [*Shaking himself.*] That was no easy job.

A WOMAN [*left, center*]. Take care what you are doing. You are wetting my whole dress.

BEGGAR. [*Left.*] [*Whimpering.*] Oh! — Oh! — Oh! —

YOUNG MAN [*left*]. [*Shaking the Workingman's hand.*] You are a noble fellow. I saw how brave you were.

WORKINGMAN [*business like*]. Did you? Then give me your name and address.

YOUNG MAN [*gives him a card*]. Jules Leboeof, Rue d'Hauteville.

WORKINGMAN. Who else saw it?

BEGGAR. Oh! Oh! Oh!

WORKINGMAN. Shut your mouth. Your turn comes next. Who else saw me save him?

TOWNSMAN. [*R. C.*] Aristide Beaurepard, Rue de Lagny, a14.

TOWNSWOMAN. Must you mix in everything? This is nothing to you. Do you want to get in trouble? You didn't see a thing. Why you just want to get in trouble? You didn't see a thing. Why you just this moment came. What do you want the address for, eh?

WORKINGMAN. Do you think I am taking cold baths for my health? I want to get a medal for life saving.

A MAN. You have a chance to get an award from the Carnegie fund for life saving.

WORKINGMAN. Don't I know it. I read all about it in "Humanitie" yesterday. Do you think I'd have jumped in the water otherwise?

[*A crowd has collected around the Beggar.*]

BEGGAR. O God! O God! I'm soaking wet.

AMERICAN [*cold bloodedly.*] Isn't that surprising?

BEGGAR. I am freezing. I am freezing to death.

COCOTTE. Waiter, bring him a glass of brandy and charge it to me. [*Waiter exit Right.*]

CHILD [*whimpering*]. I am freezing too, Mama, I'm cold.

TOWNSWOMAN. My poor little Phillip. [*To her husband.*] You never think of bringing a coat for the child. There, my darling, you shall have a cup of hot coffee right away.

CHILD. Coffee is pfui. I want brandy!

TOWNSMAN [*sternly*]. Brandy is not for children. You'll drink coffee.

TOWNSWOMAN. Who says brandy is not for children? You get the most foolish ideas in your head. Hush, hush, my baby, you shall have some brandy.

AMERICAN. They ought to offer a medal for the murder of certain kinds of wives.

BEGGAR. Oh! [*Whimpering.*] Oh, what a life I lead! What a life!

A MAN [*feeding sugar to the dog*].

BEGGAR. I wish I were dead. Why did they pull me out? I want to die. What does life mean to me? What joy is there in life for me?

ARTIST. There will be less joy for you in death. [*Laughter.*]

BEGGAR. If I were only young. If I only had my two strong arms again. I never dreamed I would come to this. I never would have believed it — Forty years ago I was a workingman, yes, forty years until an accident —

WORKINGMAN. Were you a Union man, brother?

BEGGAR. Certainly — certainly. [*Guardedly.*] That is, I wasn't exactly a Union man but —

WORKINGMAN. What! Not a Union man. [*Rushes at him.*]

TOWNSMAN. What do you want to do to that poor man?

WORKINGMAN. Throw him back in the river. [*He is held back.*]

BEGGAR. Forty years I worked at the machine — and now I have nothing to show for it but diseased lungs.

TOWNSWOMAN [*decisively*]. Aristide, we are going home. Tuberculosis is contagious.

WORKINGMAN. That's capital for you. The capitalist sucks the workingman dry and then turns him out on the streets to starve. But we, the people, shall have our day. When first the uprising of the masses —

AMERICAN. Oh, don't make a speech.

BEGGAR [*whining*]. And my military medal is gone. I must have lost it in the water. You can still see the saber wound on my arm.

YOUNG MAN. Thus the Fatherland repays its valiant sons.

BEGGAR. Nobody knows what I suffered for France. Twenty years I served in the foreign legion.

AMERICAN. This fellow ought to be celebrating his two hundredth birthday soon.

BEGGAR. O God — my poor wife — my poor children — the youngest is just four months old —

COCOTTE. Poor soul, here are two francs for you. [*Other people take out their purses.*]

BEGGAR. God bless you mademoiselle. [*Holds out his hat for the other alms.*]

[*During the excitement the Beggar passes through the crowd begging and singing.*]

BEGGAR.

The rich man in his banquet hall,
Has everything I long for.
The poor man gets the crumbs that fall,
That's what I sing this song for.
Help a poor man, sir.

AMERICAN [*cries out in sudden alarm.*] My dog! My Molly! She has jumped into the river! [*The crowd is still and listening to him.*] She will drown! [*Runs to the edge of the dock.*] There she is — swimming. Oh, my Molly! She cost me eighty dollars. [*Desperately.*] A hundred dollars to the man that saves my dog. A hundred dollars.

A MAN. Do you mean that?

AMERICAN [*deaf to everything but his anxiety*]. A hundred dollars. Here, I'll put it up with the Waiter — a hundred dollars for my poor dog.

VOICES IN THE CROWD. A hundred dollars! Five hundred francs!

[*The Crowd moves, pushing and gesticulating to the water's edge. One by one they jump into the Seine with a great splashing. Only the American, the Young Man, the Cocotte and the Beggar remain.*

AMERICAN. My poor Molly! She loved me like a son! Where is that pole? [*Gets pole and thrusts with it in the water.*]

A VOICE. Hey! Oh! My head!

AMERICAN [*beside himself*]. There — over there — the poor dog never had a swimming lesson. [*Sees the Young Man.*] What are you standing there for? You with your precious neighborly love! A hundred and fifty dollars for my dog! Jump in! Here is a deposit. [*Pushes money in his hand.*]

YOUNG MAN [*makes ready to jump, but stops at the edge and turns around*]. No! For a dog? Never!

AMERICAN. It was a thoroughbred dog. Jump! I'll give you two hundred — I'll take you back to the U. S. A. with me — I'll pay for your musical education — anything — if you save my dog.

YOUNG MAN. Will you really pay for my musical education if I save your dog?

AMERICAN [*on knees by wall*]. Every instrument there is — piano, piccolo, cornet, bass drum — only jump! — jump!

YOUNG MAN [*upon wall throws a farewell kiss to the Cocotte, takes a heroic posture*]. With God! [*Makes a perfect dive into the river.*]

AMERICAN [*at the end of the dock, brokenly*]. Poor Molly! [*Dries his eyes with handkerchief.*] I'll endow a home for poor Parisians if she is brought back to me alive. [*To the Cocotte.*] Oh, dear lady, I don't know whether I shall be able to meet you to-morrow at the Avenue de l'Opera. I have had a bereavement. [*Comes down to the pavement.*] I must telephone to the lifeguard station. [*Exits into the café.*] Poor Molly! All the insurance I carried on her is three thousand dollars. [*Exit with Artist into café, Right.*] [*There is a brief pause.*]

BEGGAR [*angrily*]. Damn his heart; the dog tender! I hope he drowns himself. Just as I was doing the best business in weeks that damn dog had to spoil everything. The scabby beast.

COCOTTE. How often have I asked you not to use those vulgar expressions.

BEGGAR. What! Is that how a daughter should speak to her father? You shameless wench! I'll teach you. I'll be lame again hereafter. For when I am lame I carry a stick and a stick is a good thing to have in your hand to teach a daughter respect. Ten francs; you know for the picture. [*While he speaks he is taking off his coat and vest, showing a cork life belt beneath.*] That suicide trick is getting played out anyhow — hardly 50 francs — and I had to pay 20 for the place. Come my daughter, we will go home. [*Calls.*] Waiter — Waiter!

COCOTTE. He doesn't hear you, papa — Waiter if you don't come at once we shall go without paying. [*The Waiter enters with hat wet.*]

BEGGAR [*slips him a gold piece*]. Waiter, call a taxicab.

[*The Waiter takes the coin with a respectful bow, blows his taxi whistle. As the answering whistle of the taxicab and the honk of the horn are heard the Beggar and Cocotte exit ceremoniously and the curtain falls.*

[*Curtain.*]

THE TENOR

A Comedy

By Frank Wedekind

Translated by André Tridon.

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CHARACTERS

GERARDO [*Wagnerian tenor, thirty-six years old*].
HELEN MAROVA [*a beautiful dark-haired woman of twenty-five*].
PROFESSOR DUHRING [*sixty, the typical "misunderstood genius"*].
MISS ISABEL CŒURNE [*a blonde English girl of sixteen*].
MULLER [*hotel manager*].
A VALET.
A BELL BOY.
AN UNKNOWN WOMAN.

TIME: *The present.*
PLACE: *A city in Austria.*

THE TENOR was first produced in America by the Washington Square Players. Applications for permission to perform THE TENOR must be addressed to André Tridon, 121 Madison Avenue, New York.

THE TENOR

A Comedy

By Frank Wedekind

[Scene: *A large hotel room. There are doors at the right and in the center, and at the left a window with heavy portières. Behind a grand piano at the right stands a Japanese screen which conceals the fireplace. There are several large trunks, open; bunches of flowers are all over the room; many bouquets are piled up on the piano.*]

Valet [*entering from the adjoining room carrying an armful of clothes which he proceeds to pack in one of the trunks. There is a knock at the door*]. Come in.

Bell Boy. There is a lady who wants to know if the Maestro is in.

Valet. He isn't in. [*Exit Bell Boy. The Valet goes into the adjoining room and returns with another armful of clothes. There is another knock at the door. He puts the clothes on a chair and goes to the door.*] What's this again? [*He opens the door and some one hands him several large bunches of flowers, which he places carefully on the piano; then he goes back to his packing. There is another knock. He opens the door and takes a handful of letters. He glances at the addresses and reads aloud:* "Mister Gerardo. Monsieur Gerardo. Gerardo Esquire. Signor Gerardo." [*He drops the letters on a tray and resumes his packing.*]

[*Enter Gerardo.*]

Gerardo. Haven't you finished packing yet? How much longer will it take you?

Valet. I'll be through in a minute, sir.

Gerardo. Hurry! I still have things to do. Let me see. [*He reaches for something in a trunk.*] God Almighty! Don't you know how to fold a pair of trousers? (*Taking the trousers out.*] This is what you call packing! Look here! You still have something to learn from me, after all. You take the trousers like this. . . . You lock this up here. . . . Then you take hold of these buttons. Watch these buttons here, that's the important thing. Then — you pull them straight. . . . There. . . . There. . . . Then you fold them here. . . . See. . . . Now these trousers would keep their shape for a hundred years.

Valet [*respectfully, with downcast eyes*]. You must have been a tailor once, sir.

Gerardo. What! Well, not exactly. . . . [*He gives the trousers to the Valet.*] Pack those up, but be quick about it. Now about that train. You are sure this is the last one we can take?

Valet. It is the only one that gets you there in time, sir. The next train does not reach Brussels until ten o'clock.

Gerardo. Well, then, we must catch this one. I will just have time to go over the second act. Unless I go over that. . . . Now don't let anybody . . . I am out to everybody.

Valet. All right, sir. There are some letters for you, sir.

Gerardo. I have seen them.

Valet. And flowers!

Gerardo. Yes, all right. [*He takes the letters from the tray and throws them on a chair before the piano. Then he opens the letters, glances over them with beaming eyes, crumples them up and throws them under the chair.*] Remember! I am out to everybody.

Valet. I know, sir. [*He locks the trunks.*]

Gerardo. To everybody.

Valet. You needn't worry, sir. [*Giving him the trunk keys.*] Here are the keys, sir.

Gerardo [*pocketing the keys*]. To everybody!

Valet. The trunks will be taken down at once. [*He goes out.*]

GERARDO [*looking at his watch*]. Forty minutes. [*He pulls the score of "Tristan" from underneath the flowers on the piano and walks up and down humming.*] *"Isolde! Geliebte! Bist du mein? Hab' ich dich wieder? Darf ich dich fassen?"* [*He clears his throat, strikes a chord on the piano and starts again.*] *"Isolde! Geliebte! Bist du mein? Hab' ich dich wieder? . . ."* [*He clears his throat.*] The air is dead here. [*He sings.*] *"Isolde! Geliebte. . . ."* It's oppressive here. Let's have a little fresh air. [*He goes to the window at the left and fumbles for the curtain cord.*] Where is the thing? On the other side! Here! [*He pulls the cord and throws his head back with an annoyed expression when he sees Miss Cœurne.*]

MISS CŒURNE [*in three-quarter length skirt, her blonde hair down her back, holding a bunch of red roses; she speaks with an English accent and looks straight at Gerardo*]. Oh, please don't send me away.

GERARDO. What else can I do? God knows, I haven't asked you to come here. Do not take it badly, dear young lady, but I have to sing to-morrow night in Brussels. I must confess, I hoped I would have this half-hour to myself. I had just given positive orders not to let any one, whoever it might be, come up to my rooms.

MISS CŒURNE [*coming down stage*]. Don't send me away. I heard you yesterday in "Tannhäuser," and I was just bringing you these roses, and —

GERARDO. And — and what?

MISS CŒURNE. And myself. . . . I don't know whether you understand me.

GERARDO [*holding the back of a chair; he hesitates, then shakes his head*]. Who are you?

MISS CŒURNE. My name is Miss Cœurne.

GERARDO. Yes. . . . Well?

MISS CŒURNE. I am very silly.

GERARDO. I know. Come here, my dear girl. [*He sits down in an armchair and she stands before him.*] Let's have a good earnest talk, such as you have never had in your life — and seem to need. An artist like myself — don't misunderstand me; you are — how old are you?

MISS CŒURNE. Twenty-two.

GERARDO. You are sixteen or perhaps seventeen. You make yourself a little older so as to appear more — tempting. Well? Yes, you are very silly. It is really none of my business, as an artist, to cure you of your silliness. . . . Don't take this badly. . . . Now then! Why are you staring away like this?

MISS CŒURNE. I said I was very silly, because I thought you Germans liked that in a young girl.

GERARDO. I am not a German, but just the same . . .

MISS CŒURNE. What! I am not as silly as all that.

GERARDO. Now look here, my dear girl — you have your tennis court, your skating club; you have your riding class, your dances; you have all a young girl can wish for. What on earth made you come to me?

MISS CŒURNE. Because all those things are awful, and they bore me to death.

GERARDO. I will not dispute that. Personally, I must tell you, I know life from an entirely different side. But, my child, I am a man; I am thirty-six. The time will come when you, too, will claim a fuller existence. Wait another two years and there will be some one for you, and then you won't need to — hide yourself behind curtains, in my room, in the room of a man who — never asked you, and whom you don't know any better than — the whole continent of Europe knows him — in order to look at life from his — wonderful point of view. [*Miss Cœurne sighs deeply.*] Now then . . . Many thanks from the bottom of my heart for your roses. [*He presses her hand.*] Will this do for to-day?

MISS CŒURNE. I had never in all my life thought of a man, until I saw you on the stage last night in "Tannhäuser." And I promise you —

GERARDO. Oh, don't promise me anything, my child. What good could your promise do me? The burden of it would all fall upon you. You see, I am talking to you as lovingly as the most loving father could. Be thankful to God that with your recklessness you haven't fallen into the hands of another artist. [*He presses her hand again.*] Let this be a lesson to you and never try it again.

Miss Cœurne [*holding her handkerchief to her face but shedding no tears.*] Am I so homely?

Gerardo. Homely! Not homely, but young and indiscreet. [*He rises nervously, goes to the right, comes back, puts his arm around her waist and takes her hand.*] Listen to me, child. You are not homely because I have to be a singer, because I have to be an artist. Don't misunderstand me, but I can't see why I should simply, because I am an artist. have to assure you that I appreciate your youthful freshness and beauty. It is a question of time. Two hundred, maybe three hundred, nice, lovely girls of your age saw me last night in the rôle of Tannhäuser. Now if every one of those girls made the same demands upon me which you are making — what would become of my singing? What would become of my voice? What would become of my art?

[*Miss Cœurne sinks into a seat, covers her face and weeps.*]

Gerardo [*leaning over the back of her chair, in a friendly tone*]. It is a crime for you, child, to weep over the fact that you are still so young. Your whole life is ahead of you. Is it my fault if you fell in love with me? They all do. That is what I am for. Now won't you be a good girl and let me, for the few minutes I have left, prepare myself for to-morrow's appearance?

Miss Cœurne [*rising and drying her tears*]. I can't believe that any other girl would have acted the way I have.

Gerardo [*leading her to the door*]. No, dear child.

Miss Cœurne [*with sobs in her voice*]. At least, not if —

Gerardo. If my valet had stood before the door.

Miss Cœurne. If —

Gerardo. If the girl had been as beautiful and youthfully fresh as you.

Miss Cœurne. If —

Gerardo. If she had heard me only once in "Tannhäuser."

Miss Cœurne [*indignant*]. If she were as respectable as I am!

Gerardo [*pointing to the piano*]. Before saying good-by to me, child, have a look at all those flowers. May this be a warning to you in case you feel tempted again to fall in love with a singer. See how fresh they all are. And I have to let them wither, dry up, or I give them to the porter. And look at those letters. [*He takes a handful of them from a tray.*] I don't know any of those women. Don't worry; I leave them all to their fate. What else could I do? But I'll wager with you that every one of your lovely young friends sent in her little note.

Miss Cœurne. Well, I promise not to do it again, not to hide myself behind your curtains. But don't send me away.

Gerardo. My time, my time, dear child. If I were not on the point of taking a train! I have already told you, I am very sorry for you. But my train leaves in twenty-five minutes. What do you expect?

Miss Cœurne. A kiss.

Gerardo [*stiffening up*]. From me?

Miss Cœurne. Yes.

Gerardo [*holding her around the waist and looking very serious*]. You rob Art of its dignity, my child. I do not wish to appear an unfeeling brute, and I am going to give you my picture. Give me your word that after that you will leave me.

Miss Cœurne. Yes.

Gerardo. Good. [*He sits at the table and autographs one of his pictures.*] You should try to become interested in the operas themselves instead of the men who sing them. You would probably derive much greater enjoyment.

Miss Cœurne [*to herself*]. I am too young yet.

Gerardo. Sacrifice yourself to music. [*He comes down stage and gives her the picture.*] Don't see in me a famous tenor but a mere tool in the hands of a noble master. Look at all the married women among your acquaintances. All Wagnerians. Study Wagner's works; learn to understand his *leit motifs.* That will save you from further foolishness.

Miss Cœurne. I thank you.

[*Gerardo leads her out and rings the bell. He takes up his piano score again. There is a knock at the door.*]

Valet [*coming in out of breath*]. Yes, sir.

Gerardo. Are you standing at the door?

VALET. Not just now, sir.

GERARDO. Of course not! Be sure not to let anybody come up here.

VALET. There were three ladies who asked for you, sir.

GERARDO. Don't you dare to let any one of them come up, whatever she may tell you.

VALET. And then here are some more letters.

GERARDO. Oh, all right. [*The Valet places the letters on a tray.*] And don't you dare to let any one come up.

VALET [*at the door*]. No, sir.

GEARDO. Even if she offers to settle a fortune upon you.

VALET. No, sir. [*He goes out.*]

GERARDO [*singing*]. "*Isolde! Geliebte! Bist du . . .*" Well, if women don't get tired of me — Only the world is so full of them; and I am only one man. Every one has his burden to carry. [*He strikes a chord on the piano.*]

[*Prof. Duhring, dressed all in black, with a long white beard, a red hooked nose, gold spectacles, Prince Albert coat and silk hat, an opera score under his arm, enters without knocking.*]

GERARDO. What do you want?

DUHRING. Maestro — I — I — have — an opera.

GERARDO. How did you get in?

DUHRING. I have been watching for two hours for a chance to run up the stairs unnoticed.

GERARDO. But, my dear good man, I have no time.

DUHRING. Oh, I will not play the whole opera for you.

GERARDO. I haven't the time. My train leaves in forty minutes.

DUHRING. You haven't the time! What should I say? You are thirty and successful. You have your whole life to live yet. Just listen to your part in my opera. You promised to listen to it when you came to this city.

GERARDO. What is the use? I am not a free agent —

DUHRING. Please! Please! Please! Maestro! I stand before you an old man, ready to fall on my knees before you; an old man who has never cared for anything in the world but his art. For fifty years I have been a willing victim to the tyranny of art —

GERARDO [*interrupting him*]. Yes, I understand; I understand, but —

DUHRING [*excitedly*]. No, you don't understand. You could not understand. How could you, the favorite of fortune, you understand what fifty years of bootless work means? But I will try to make you understand it. You see, I am too old to take my own life. People who do that do it at twenty-five, and I let the time pass by. I must now drag along to the end of my days. Please, sir, please don't let these moments pass in vain for me, even if you have to lose a day thereby, a week even. This is in your own interest. A week ago, when you first came for your special appearances, you promised to let me play my opera for you. I have come here every day since; either you had a rehearsal or a woman caller. And now you are on the point of going away. You have only to say one word: I will sing the part of Hermann — and they will produce my opera. You will then thank God for my insistance. . . . Of course you sing Siegfried, you sing Florestan — but you have no rôle like Hermann in your repertoire, no rôle better suited to your middle register.

[*Gerardo leans against the mantelpiece; while drumming on the top with his right hand, he discovers something behind the screen; he suddenly stretches out his arm and pulls out a woman in a gray gown, whom he leads out of the room through the middle door; after closing the door, he turns to Duhring.*]

GERARDO. Oh, are you still there?

DUHRING [*undisturbed*]. This opera is good; it is dramatic; it *is* a financial success. I can show you letters from Liszt, from Wagner from Rubinstein, in which they consider me as a superior man. And why hasn't any opera ever been produced? Because I am not crying wares on the market-place. And then you know our directors: they will revive ten dead men before they give a live man a chance. Their walls are well guarded. At thirty you are in. At sixty I am still out. One word from you and I shall be in, too. This is why I have come, and [*raising his voice*] if you are not an unfeeling brute, if success has not killed in

you the last spark of artistic sympathy, you will not refuse to hear my work.

GERARDO. I will give you an answer in a week. I will go over your opera. Let me have it.

DUHRING. No, I am too old, Maestro. In a week, in what you call a week, I shall be dead and buried. In a week — that is what they all say; and then they keep it for years.

GERARDO. I am very sorry but —

DUHRING. To-morrow perhaps you will be on your knees before me; you will boast of knowing me . . . and to-day, in your sordid lust for gold, you cannot even spare the half-hour which would mean the breaking of my fetters.

GERARDO. No, really, I have only thirty-five minutes left, and unless I go over a few passages . . . You know I sing Tristan in Brussels to-morrow night. [*He pulls out his watch.*] I haven't even half an hour . . .

DUHRING. Half an hour . . . Oh, then, let me play to you your big aria at the end of the first act. [*He attempts to sit down on the piano bench. Gerardo restrains him.*]

GERARDO. Now, frankly, my dear sir . . . I am a singer; I am not a critic. If you wish to have your opera produced, address yourself to those gentlemen who are paid to know what is good and what is not. People scorn and ignore my opinions in such matters as completely as they appreciate and admire my singing.

DUHRING. My dear Maestro, you may take it from me that I myself attach no importance whatever to your judgment. What do I care about your opinions? I know you tenors; I would like to play my score for you so that you could say: "I would like to sing the rôle of Hermann."

GERARDO. If you only knew how many things I would like to do and which I have to renounce, and how many things I must do for which I do not care in the least! Half a million a year does not repay me for the many joys of life which I must sacrifice for the sake of my profession. I am not a free man. But you were a free man all your life. Why didn't you go to the market-place and cry your wares?

DUHRING. Oh, the vulgarity of it . . . I have tried it a hundred times. I am a composer, Maestro, and nothing more.

GERARDO. By which you mean that you have exhausted all your strength in the writing of your operas and kept none of it to secure their production.

DUHRING. That is true.

GERARDO. The composers I know reverse the process. They get their operas written somehow and then spend all their strength in an effort to get them produced.

DUHRING. That is the type of artist I despise.

GERARDO. Well, I despise the type of man that wastes his life in useless endeavor. What have you done in those fifty years of struggle, for yourself or for the world? Fifty years of useless struggle! That should convince-the worst blockhead of the impracticability of his dreams. What have you done with your life? You have wasted it shamefully. If I had wasted my life as you have wasted yours — of course I am only speaking for myself — I don't think I should have the courage to look any one in the face.

DUHRING. I am not doing it for myself; I am doing it for my art.

GERARDO [*scornfully*]. Art, my dear man! Let me tell you that art is quite different from what the papers tell us it is.

DUHRING. To me it is the highest thing in the world.

GERARDO. You may believe that, but nobody else does. We artists are merely a luxury for the use of the *bourgeoisie*. When I stand there on the stage I feel absolutely certain that not one solitary human being in the audience takes the slightest interest in what we, the artists, are doing. If they did, how could they listen to "Die Walküre," for instance? Why, it is an indecent story which could not be mentioned anywhere in polite society. And yet, when I sing Siegmund, the most puritanical mothers bring their fourteen-year-old daughters to hear me. This, you see, is the meaning of whatever you call art. This is what you have sacrificed fifty years of your life to. Find out how many people came to hear me sing and how many came to gape at me as they would at the Emperor of China if he should turn up here to-morrow.

Do you know what the artistic wants of the public consist in? To applaud, to send flowers, to have a subject for conversation, to see and be seen. They pay me half a million, but then I make business for hundreds of cabbies, writers, dressmakers, restaurant keepers. It keeps money circulating; it keeps blood running. It gets girls engaged, spinsters married, wives tempted, old cronies supplied with gossip; a woman loses her pocketbook in the crowd, a fellow becomes insane during the performance. Doctors, lawyers made . . . [*He coughs.*] And with this I must sing Tristan in Brussels to-morrow night! I tell you all this, not out of vanity, but to cure you of your delusions. The measure of a man's worth is the world's opinion of him, not the inner belief which one finally adopts after brooding over it for years. Don't imagine that you are a misunderstood genius. There are no misunderstood geniuses.

DUHRING. Let me just play to you the first scene of the second act. A park landscape as in the painting, "Embarkation for the Isle of Cythera."

GERARDO. I repeat to you I have no time. And furthermore, since Wagner's death the need for new operas has never been felt by any one. If you come with new music, you set against yourself all the music schools, the artists, the public. If you want to succeed just steal enough out of Wagner's works to make up a whole opera. Why should I cudgel my brains with your new music when I have cudgeled them cruelly with the old?

DUHRING [*holding out his trembling hand*]. I am afraid I am too old to learn how to steal. Unless one begins very young, one can never learn it.

GERARDO. Don't feel hurt. My dear sir — if I could . . . The thought of how you have to struggle . . . I happen to have received some five hundred marks more than my fee . . .

DUHRING [*turning to the door*]. Don't! Please don't! Do not say that. I did not try to show you my opera in order to work a touch. No, I think too much of this child of my brain . . . No, Maestro.

[*He goes out through the center door.*]

GERARDO [*following him to the door*]. I beg your pardon. . . . Pleased to have met you.

[*He closes the door and sinks into an armchair. A voice is heard outside: "I will not let that man step in my way." Helen rushes into the room followed by the Valet. She is an unusually beautiful young woman in street dress.*]

HELEN. That man stood there to prevent me from seeing you!

GERARDO. Helen!

HELEN. You knew that I would come to see you.

VALET [*rubbing his cheek*]. I did all I could, sir, but this lady actually —

HELEN. Yes, I slapped his face.

GERARDO. Helen!

HELEN. Should I have let him insult me?

GERARDO [*to the Valet*]. Please leave us.

[*The Valet goes out.*]

HELEN [*placing her muff on a chair*]. I can no longer live without you. Either you take me with you or I will kill myself.

GERARDO. Helen!

HELEN. Yes, kill myself. A day like yesterday, without even seeing you — no, I could not live through that again. I am not strong enough. I beseech you, Oscar, take me with you.

GERARDO. I couldn't.

HELEN. You could if you wanted to. You can't leave me without killing me. These are not mere words. This isn't a threat. It is a fact: I will die if I can no longer have you. You must take me with you — it is your duty — if only for a short time.

GERARDO. I give you my word of honor, Helen, I can't — I give you my word.

HELEN. You must, Oscar. Whether you can or not, you must bear the consequences of your acts. I love life, but to me life and you are one and the same thing. Take me with you, Oscar, if you don't want to have my blood on your hands.

GERARDO. Do you remember what I said to you the first day we were together here?

HELEN. I remember, but what good does that do me?

GERARDO. I said that there couldn't be any question of love between us.

HELEN. I can't help that. I didn't know you then. I never knew what a man could be to me until I met you. You know very well that it would come to this, otherwise you wouldn't have obliged me to promise not to make you a parting scene.

GERARDO. I simply cannot take you with me.

HELEN. Oh, God! I knew you would say that! I knew it when I came here. That's what you say to every woman. And I am just one of a hundred. I know it. But, Oscar, I am lovesick; I am dying of love. This is your work, and you can save me without any sacrifice on your part, without assuming any burden. Why can't you do it?

GERARDO [*very slowly*]. Because my contract forbids me to marry or to travel in the company of a woman.

HELEN [*disturbed*]. What can prevent you?

GERARDO. My contract.

HELEN. You cannot . . .

GERARDO. I cannot marry until my contract expires.

HELEN. And you cannot . . .

GERARDO. I cannot travel in the company of a woman.

HELEN. That is incredible. And whom in the world should it concern?

GERARDO. My manager.

HELEN. Your manager! What business is it of his?

GERARDO. It is precisely his business.

HELEN. Is it perhaps because it might — affect your voice?

GERARDO. Yes.

HELEN. That is preposterous. Does it affect your voice?

[*Gerardo chuckles.*]

HELEN. Does your manager believe that nonsense?

GERARDO. No, he doesn't.

HELEN. This is beyond me. I can't understand how a decent man could sign such a contract.

GERARDO. I am an artist first and a man next.

HELEN. Yes, that's what you are — a great artist — an eminent artist. Can't you understand how much I must love you? You are the first man whose superiority I have felt and whom I desired to please, and you despise me for it. I have bitten my lips many a time not to let you suspect how much you meant to me; I was so afraid I might bore you. Yesterday, however, put me in a state of mind which no woman can endure. If I didn't love you so insanely, Oscar, you would think more of me. That is the terrible thing about you — that you must scorn a woman who thinks the world of you.

GERARDO. Helen!

HELEN. Your contract! Don't use your contract as a weapon to murder me with. Let me go with you, Oscar. You will see if your manager ever mentions a breach of contract. He would not do such a thing. I know men. And if he says a word, it will be time then for me to die.

GERARDO. We have no right to do that, Helen. You are just as little free to follow me, as I am to shoulder such a responsibility. I don't belong to myself; I belong to my art.

HELEN. Oh, leave your art alone. What do I care about your art? Has God created a man like you to make a puppet of himself every night? You should be ashamed of it instead of boasting of it. You see, I overlooked the fact that you were merely an artist. What wouldn't I overlook for a god like you? Even if you were a convict, Oscar, my feelings would be the same. I would lie in the dust at your feet and beg for your pity. I would face death as I am facing it now.

GERARDO [*laughing*]. Facing death, Helen! Women who are endowed with your gifts for enjoying life don't make away with themselves. You know even better than I do the value of life.

HELEN [*dreamily*]. Oscar, I didn't say that I would shoot myself. When did I say that? Where would I find the courage to do that? I only said that I will die, if you don't take me with you. I will die as I would of an illness, for I only live when I am with you. I can live without my home, without my children, but not without you, Oscar. I cannot live without you.

GERARDO. Helen, if you don't calm yourself . . . You put me in an awful position. . . . I have only ten minutes left . . . I can't explain in court that

your excitement made me break my contract . . . I can only give you ten minutes. . . . If you don't calm yourself in that time . . . I can't leave you alone in this condition. Think all you have at stake!

HELEN. As though I had anything else at stake!

GERARDO. You can lose your position in society.

HELEN. I can lose you!

GERARDO. And your family?

HELEN. I care for no one but you.

GERARDO. But I cannot be yours.

HELEN. Then I have nothing to lose but my life.

GERARDO. Your children!

HELEN. Who has taken me from them, Oscar? Who has taken me from my children?

GERARDO. Did I make any advances to you?

HELEN [*passionately*]. No, no. I have thrown myself at you, and would throw myself at you again. Neither my husband nor my children could keep me back. When I die, at least I will have lived; thanks to you, Oscar! I thank you, Oscar, for revealing me to myself. I thank you for that.

GERARDO. Helen, calm yourself and listen to me.

HELEN. Yes, yes, for ten minutes.

GERARDO. Listen to me. [*Both sit down on the divan.*]

HELEN [*staring at him*]. Yes, I thank you for it.

GERARDO. Helen!

HELEN. I don't even ask you to love me. Let me only breathe the air you breathe.

GERARDO [*trying to be calm*]. Helen — a man of my type cannot be swayed by any of the bourgeois ideas. I have known society women in every country of the world. Some made parting scenes to me, but at least they all knew what they owed to their position. This is the first time in my life that I have witnessed such an outburst of passion. . . . Helen, the temptation comes to me daily to step with some woman into an idyllic Arcadia. But every human being has his duties; you have your duties as I have mine, and the call of duty is the highest thing in the world . . .

HELEN. I know better than you do what the highest duty is.

GERARDO. What, then? Your love for me? That's what they all say. Whatever a woman has set her heart on winning is to her good; whatever crosses her plans is evil. It is the fault of our playwrights. To draw full houses they set the world upside down, and when a woman abandons her children and her family to follow her instincts they call that — oh, broad-mindedness. I personally wouldn't mind living the way turtle doves live. But since I am a part of this world I must obey my duty first. Then whenever the opportunity arises I quaff of the cup of joy. Whoever refuses to do his duty has no right to make any demands upon another fellow being.

HELEN [*staring absent-mindedly*]. That does not bring the dead back to life.

GERARDO [*nervously*]. Helen, I will give you back your life. I will give you back what you have sacrificed for me. For God's sake take it. What does it come to, after all? Helen, how can a woman lower herself to that point? Where is your pride? What am I in the eyes of the world? A man who makes a puppet of himself every night! Helen, are you going to kill yourself for a man whom hundreds of women loved before you, whom hundreds of women will love after you without letting their feelings disturb their life one second? Will you, by shedding your warm red blood, make yourself ridiculous before God and the world?

HELEN [*looking away from him*]. I know I am asking a good deal, but — what else can I do?

GERARDO. Helen, you said I should bear the consequences of my acts. Will you reproach for not refusing to receive you when you first came here, ostensibly to ask me to try your voice? What can a man do in such a case? You are the beauty of this town. Either I would be known as the bear among artists who denies himself to all women callers, or I might have received you and pretended that I didn't understand what you meant and then pass for a fool. Or the very first day I might have talked to you as frankly as I am talking now. Dangerous business. You would have called me

a conceited idiot. Tell me, Helen — what else could I do?

HELEN [*staring at him with imploring eyes, shuddering and making an effort to speak*]. O God! O God! Oscar, what would you say if to-morrow I should go and be as happy with another man as I have been with you? Oscar — what would you say?

GERARDO [*after a silence*]. Nothing. [*He looks at his watch.*] Helen —

HELEN. Oscar! [*She kneels before him.*] For the last time, I implore you. . . . You don't know what you are doing. . . . It isn't your fault — but don't let me die. . . . Save me — save me!

GERARDO [*raising her up.*] Helen, I am not such a wonderful man. How many men have you known? The more men you come to know, the lower all men will fall in your estimation. When you know men better you will not take your life for any one of them. You will not think any more of them than I do of women.

HELEN. I am not like you in that respect.

GERARDO. I speak earnestly, Helen. We don't fall in love with one person or another; we fall in love with our type, which we find everywhere in the world if we only look sharply enough.

HELEN. And when we meet our type, are we sure then of being loved again?

GERARDO [*angrily*]. You have no right to complain of your husband. Was any girl ever compelled to marry against her will? That is all rot. It is only the women who have sold themselves for certain material advantages and then try to dodge their obligations who try to make us believe that nonsense.

HELEN [*smiling*]. They break their contracts.

GERARDO [*pounding his chest*]. When I sell myself, at least I am honest about it.

HELEN. Isn't love honest?

GERARDO. No! Love is a beastly bourgeois virtue. Love is the last refuge of the mollycoddle, of the coward. In my world every man has his actual value, and when two human beings make up a pact they know exactly what to expect from each other. Love has nothing to do with it, either.

HELEN. Won't you lead me into your world, then?

GERARDO. Helen, will you compromise the happiness of your life and the happiness of your dear ones for just a few days' pleasure?

HELEN. No.

GERARDO [*much relieved*]. Will you promise me to go home quietly now?

HELEN. Yes.

GERARDO. And will you promise me that you will not die . . .

HELEN. Yes.

GERARDO. You promise me that?

HELEN. Yes.

GERARDO. And you promise me to fulfill your duties as mother and — as wife?

HELEN. Yes.

GERARDO. Helen!

HELEN. Yes. What else do you want? I will promise anything.

GERARDO. And now may I go away in peace?

HELEN [*rising*]. Yes.

GERARDO. A last kiss?

HELEN. Yes, yes, yes. [*They kiss passionately.*]

GERARDO. In a year I am booked again to sing here, Helen.

HELEN In a year! Oh, I am glad!

GERARDO [*tenderly*]. Helen!

[*Helen presses his hand, takes a revolver out of her muff, shoots herself and falls.*]

GERARDO. Helen! [*He totters and collapses in an armchair.*]

BELL BOY [*rushing in*]. My God! Mr. Gerardo! [*Gerardo remains motionless; the Bell Boy rushes toward Helen.*]

GERARDO [*jumping up, running to the door and colliding with the manager of the hotel*]. Send for the police! I must be arrested! If I went away now I should be a brute, and if I stay I break my contract. I still have [*looking at his watch*] one minute and ten seconds.

MANAGER. Fred, run and get a policeman.

BELL BOY. All right, sir.

MANAGER. Be quick about it. [*To Gerardo.*] Don't take it too hard, sir. Those things happen once in a while.

GERARDO [*kneeling before Helen's body and taking her hand*]. Helen! . . . She still lives — she still lives! If I am arrested I am not wilfully breaking my

contract. . . . And my trunks? Is the carriage at the door?

MANAGER. It has been waiting twenty minutes, Mr. Gerardo. [*He opens the door for the porter, who takes down one of the trunks.*]

GERARDO [*bending over her*]. Helen! [*To himself.*] Well, after all . . . [*To Muller.*] Have you called a doctor?

MANAGER. Yes, we had the doctor called at once. He will be here at any minute.

GERARDO [*holding her under the arms*]. Helen! Don't you know me any more? Helen! The doctor will be here right away, Helen. This is your Oscar.

BELL BOY [*appearing in the door at the center*]. Can't find any policeman, sir.

GERARDO [*letting Helen's body drop back*]. Well, if I can't get arrested, that settles it. I must catch that train and sing in Brussels to-morrow night. [*He takes up his score and runs out through the center door, bumping against several chairs.*]

[*Curtain.*]

A GOOD WOMAN

A Farce

By Arnold Bennett

CHARACTERS

James Brett [*a Clerk in the War Office, 33*]
Gerald O'Mara [*a Civil Engineer, 24*].
Rosamund Fife [*a Spinster and a Lecturer on Cookery, 28*].

Reprinted from "Polite Farces," published by George H. Doran Company, by special arrangement with Mr. Arnold Bennett.

A GOOD WOMAN

A Farce

By Arnold Bennett

[Scene: *Rosamund's Flat; the drawing-room. The apartment is plainly furnished. There is a screen in the corner of the room furthest from the door. It is 9* A. M. *Rosamund is seated alone at a table. She wears a neat travelling-dress, with a plain straw hat. Her gloves lie on a chair. A small portable desk full of papers is open before her. She gazes straight in front of her, smiling vaguely. With a start she recovers from her day-dreams, and rushing to the looking-glass, inspects her features therein. Then she looks at her watch.*]

Rosamund. Three hours yet! I'm a fool [*with decision. She sits down again, and idly picks up a paper out of the desk. The door opens, unceremoniously but quietly, and James enters. The two stare at each other, James wearing a conciliatory smile*].

Rosamund. You appalling creature!

James. I couldn't help it, I simply couldn't help it.

Rosamund. Do you know this is the very height and summit of indelicacy?

James. I was obliged to come.

Rosamund. If I had any relations —

James Which you haven't.

Rosamund. I say *if* I had any relations —

James. I say *which* you haven't.

Rosamund. Never mind, it is a safe rule for unattached women always to behave as if they had relations, especially female relations whether they have any or not. My remark is, that if I had any relations they would be absolutely scandalized by this atrocious conduct of yours.

James. What have I done?

Rosamund. Can you ask? Here are you, and here am I. We are to be married to-day at twelve o'clock. The ceremony has not taken place, and yet you are found on my premises. You must surely be aware that on the day of the wedding the parties — yes, the "parties," that is the word — should on no account see each other till they see each other in church.

James. But since we are to be married at a registry office, does the rule apply?

Rosamund. Undoubtedly.

James. Then I must apologize. My excuse is that I am not up in these minute details of circumspection; you see I have been married so seldom.

Rosamund. Evidently. [*A pause, during which James at last ventures to approach the middle of the room.*] Now you must go back home, and we'll pretend we haven't seen each other.

James. Never, Rosamund! That would be acting a lie. And I couldn't dream of getting married with a lie on my lips. It would be so unusual. No; we have sinned, or rather I have sinned, on this occasion. I will continue to sin — openly, brazenly. Come here, my dove. A bird in the hand is worth two under a bushel. [*He assumes an attitude of entreaty, and, leaving her chair, Rosamund goes towards him. They exchange an ardent kiss.*]

Rosamund [*quietly submissive*]. I'm awfully busy, you know, Jim.

James. I will assist you in your little duties, dearest, and then I will accompany you to the sacred ed — to the registry office. Now, what were you doing? [*She sits down, and he puts a chair for himself close beside her.*]

Rosamund. You are singularly unlike yourself this morning, dearest.

James. Nervous tension, my angel. I should have deemed it impossible that an *employé* of the War Office could experience the marvelous and exquisite sensations now agitating my heart. But

tell me, what are you doing with these papers?

ROSAMUND. Well, I was just going to look through them and see if they contained anything of a remarkable or valuable nature. You see, I hadn't anything to occupy myself with.

JAMES. Was 'oo bored, waiting for the timey-pimey to come?

ROSAMUND [*hands caressing*]. 'Iss, little pet was bored, she was. Was Mr. Pet lonely this morning? Couldn't he keep away from his little cooky-lecturer? He should see his little cooky-lecturer.

JAMES. And that reminds me, hadn't we better lunch in the train instead of at Willis's? That will give us more time?

ROSAMUND. Horrid greedy piggywiggy! Perhaps he will be satisfied if Mrs. Pet agrees to lunch both at Willis's and in the train?

JAMES. Yes. Only piggywiggy doesn't want to trespass on Mrs. Pet's good nature. Let piggywiggy look at the papers. [*He takes up a paper from the desk.*]

ROSAMUND [*a little seriously*]. No, Jimmy. I don't think we'll go through them. Perhaps it wouldn't be wise. Just let's destroy them. [*Takes papers from his hand and drops them in desk.*]

JAMES [*sternly*]. When you have been the wife of a War Office clerk for a week you will know that papers ought never to be destroyed. Now I come to think, it is not only my right but my duty to examine this secret *dossier*. Who knows — [*Takes up at random another document, which proves to be a postcard. Reads.*] "Shall come to-morrow night. Thine, Gerald."

ROSAMUND [*after a startled shriek of consternation*]. There! There! You've done it, first time! [*She begins to think, with knitted brows.*]

JAMES. Does this highly suspicious postcard point to some — some episode in your past of which you have deemed it advisable to keep me in ignorance? If so, I seek not to inquire. I forgive you — I take you, Rosamund, as you are!

ROSAMUND [*reflective, not heeding his remark*]. I had absolutely forgotten the whole affair, absolutely. [*Smiles a little. Aside.*] Suppose he should come! [*To James.*] Jim, I think I had better tell you all about Gerald. It will interest you. Besides, there is no knowing what may happen.

JAMES. As I have said, I seek not to inquire. [*Stiffly.*] Nor do I imagine that this matter, probably some childish entanglement, would interest me.

ROSAMUND. Oh, wouldn't it! Jim, don't be absurd. You know perfectly well you are dying to hear.

JAMES. Very well, save my life, then, at the least expense of words. To begin with, who is this Gerald — "thine," thine own Gerald?

ROSAMUND. Don't you remember Gerald O'Mara? You met him at the Stokes's, I feel sure. You know — the young engineer.

JAMES. Oh! *That* ass!

ROSAMUND. He isn't an ass. He's a very clever boy.

JAMES. For the sake of argument and dispatch, agreed! Went out to Cyprus or somewhere, didn't he, to build a bridge, or make a dock, or dig a well, or something of that kind?

ROSAMUND [*nodding*]. Now, listen, I'll tell you *all* about it. [*Settles herself for a long narration.*] Four years ago poor, dear Gerald was madly in love with me. He was twenty and I was twenty-four. Keep calm — I felt like his aunt. Don't forget I was awfully pretty in those days. Well, he was so tremendously in love that in order to keep him from destroying himself — of course, I knew he was going out to Cyprus — I sort of pretended to be sympathetic. I simply *had* to; Irishmen are so passionate. And he was very nice. And I barely knew you then. Well, the time approached for him to leave for Cyprus, and two days before the ship sailed he sent me that very postcard that by pure chance you picked up.

JAMES. He should have written a letter.

ROSAMUND. Oh! I expect he couldn't wait. He was so impulsive. Well, on the night before he left England he came here and proposed to me. I remember I was awfully tired and queer. I had been giving a lecture in the afternoon on "How to Pickle Pork," and the practical demonstration had been rather smelly. However, the proposal braced me up. It was the first I had had — that year. Well, I was so sorry for him that I

couldn't say "No" outright. It would have been too brutal. He might have killed himself on the spot, and spoilt this carpet, which, by the way, was new then. So I said, "Look here, Gerald —"

JAMES. You called him "Gerald"?

ROSAMUND. *Rather!* "Look here, Gerald," I said; "you are going to Cyprus for four years. If your feeling towards me is what you think it is, come back to me at the end of those four years, and I will then give you an answer." Of course I felt absolutely sure that in the intervening period he would fall in and out of love half a dozen times at least.

JAMES. Of course, half a dozen times at least; probably seven. What did he say in reply?

ROSAMUND. He agreed with all the seriousness in the world. "On this day four years hence," he said, standing just there [*pointing*], "I will return for your answer. And in the meantime I will live only for you." That was what he said — his very words.

JAMES. And a most touching speech, too! And then?

ROSAMUND. We shook hands, and he tore himself away, stifling a sob. Don't forget, he was a boy.

JAMES. Have the four years expired?

ROSAMUND. What is the date of that postcard? Let me see it. [*Snatches it, and smiles at the handwriting pensively.*] July 4th — four years ago.

JAMES. Then it's over. He's not coming. To-day is July 5th.

ROSAMUND. But yesterday was Sunday. He wouldn't come on Sunday. He was always very particular and nice.

JAMES. Do you mean to imply that you think he will come to-day and demand from you an affirmative? A moment ago you gave me to understand that in your opinion he would have — er — other affairs to attend to.

ROSAMUND. Yes. I did think so at the time. But now — now I have a kind of idea that he may come, that after all he may have remained faithful. You know I was maddeningly pretty then, and he had my photograph.

JAMES. Tell me, have you corresponded?

ROSAMUND. No, I expressly forbade it.

JAMES. Ah!

ROSAMUND. But still, I have a premonition he may come.

JAMES [*assuming a pugnacious pose*]. If he does, I will attend to him.

ROSAMUND. Gerald was a terrible fighter. [*A resounding knock is heard at the door. Both start violently, and look at each other in silence. Rosamund goes to the door and opens it.*]

ROSAMUND [*with an unsteady laugh of relief*]. Only the postman with a letter. [*She returns to her seat.*] No, I don't expect he will come, really. [*Puts letter idly on table. Another knock still louder. Renewed start.*]

ROSAMUND. Now that *is* he, I'm positive. He always knocked like that. Just fancy. After four years! Jim, just take the chair behind that screen for a bit. I *must* hide you.

JAMES. No, thanks! The screen dodge is a trifle *too* frayed at the edges.

ROSAMUND. Only for a minute. It would be *such* fun.

JAMES. No, thanks. [*Another knock.*]

ROSAMUND [*with forced sweetness*]. Oh, very well, then. . . .

JAMES. Oh, well, of course, if you take it in that way — [*He proceeds to a chair behind screen, which does not, however, hide him from the audience.*]

ROSAMUND [*smiles his reward*]. I'll explain it all right. [*Loudly.*] Come in! [*Enter Gerald O'Mara.*]

GERALD. So you are in! [*Hastens across room to shake hands.*]

ROSAMUND. Oh, yes, I am in. Gerald, how are you? I must say you look tolerably well. [*They sit down.*]

GERALD. Oh, I'm pretty fit, thanks. Had the most amazing time in spite of the climate. And you? Rosie, you haven't changed a little bit. How's the cookery trade getting along? Are you still showing people how to concoct French dinners out of old bones and a sardine tin?

ROSAMUND. Certainly. Only I can do it without the bones now. You see, the science has progressed while you've been stagnating in Cyprus.

GERALD. Stagnating is the word. You wouldn't believe that climate!

ROSAMUND. What! Not had nice weather? What a shame! I thought it was tremendously sunshiny in Cyprus.

GERALD. Yes, that's just what it is, 97°

in the shade when it doesn't happen to be pouring with malarial rain. We started a little golf club at Nicosia, and laid out a nine-hole course. But the balls used to melt. So we had to alter the rules, keep the balls in an ice-box, and take a fresh one at every hole. Think of that!

ROSAMUND. My poor boy! But I suppose there were compensations? You referred to "an amazing time."

GERALD. Yes, there were compensations. And that reminds me, I want you to come out and lunch with me at the Savoy. I've got something awfully important to ask you. In fact, that's what I've come for.

ROSAMUND. Sorry I can't, Gerald. The fact is, I've got something awfully important myself just about lunch time.

GERALD. Oh, yours can wait. Look here, I've ordered the lunch. I made sure you'd come. [*Rosamund shakes her head.*] Why can't you? It's not cooking, is it?

ROSAMUND. Only a goose.

GERALD. What goose?

ROSAMUND. Well — my own, and somebody else's. Listen, Gerald. Had you not better ask me this awfully important question now? No time like the present.

GERALD. I can always talk easier, especially on delicate topics, with a pint of something handy. But if you positively won't come, I'll get it off my chest now. The fact is, Rosie, I'm in love.

ROSAMUND. With whom?

GERALD. Ah! That's just what I want you to tell me.

ROSAMUND [*suddenly starting*]. Gerald! what is that dreadful thing sticking out of your pocket, and pointing right *at* me?

GERALD. That? That's my revolver. Always carry them in Cyprus, you know. Plenty of sport there.

ROSAMUND [*breathing again*]. Kindly take it out of your pocket and put it on the table. Then if it does go off it will go off into something less valuable than a cookery-lecturer.

GERALD [*laughingly obeying her*]. There. If anything happens it will happen to the screen. Now, Rosie, I'm in love, and I desire that you should tell me whom I'm in love with. There's a magnificent girl in Cyprus, daughter of the Superintendent of Police —

ROSAMUND. Name?

GERALD. Evelyn. Age nineteen. I tell you I was absolutely gone on her.

ROSAMUND. Symptoms?

GERALD. Well — er — whenever her name was mentioned I blushed terrifically. Of course, that was only one symptom. . . . Then I met a girl on the home steamer — no father or mother. An orphan, you know, awfully interesting.

ROSAMUND. Name?

GERALD. Madge. Nice name, isn't it? [*Rosamund nods.*] I don't mind telling you, I was considerably struck by her — still am, in fact.

ROSAMUND. Symptoms?

GERALD. Oh! . . . Let me see, I never think of her without turning absolutely pale. I suppose it's what they call "pale with passion." Notice it?

ROSAMUND [*somewhat coldly*]. It seems to me the situation amounts to this. There are two girls. One is named Evelyn, and the thought of her makes you blush. The other is named Madge, and the thought of her makes you turn pale. You fancy yourself in love, and you wish me to decide for you whether it is Madge or Evelyn who agitates your breast the more deeply.

GERALD. That's not exactly the way to put it, Rosie. You take a fellow up too soon. Of course I must tell you lots more yet. You should hear Evelyn play the "Moonlight Sonata." It's the most marvelous thing. . . . And then Madge's eyes! The way that girl can look at a fellow. . . . I'm telling you all these things, you know, Rosie, because I've always looked up to you as an elder sister.

ROSAMUND [*after a pause, during which she gazes into his face*]. I suppose it was in my character of your elder sister, that you put a certain question to me four years ago last night?

GERALD [*staggered; pulls himself together for a great resolve; after a long pause*]. Rosie! I never thought afterwards you'd take it seriously. I forgot it all. I was only a boy then. [*Speaking quicker and quicker.*] But I see clearly now. I never *could* withstand you. It's all rot about Evelyn and Madge. It's you I'm in love with; and I never guessed it! Rosie! . . . [*Rushes*

to her and impetuously flings his arms around her neck.]

JAMES [*who, during the foregoing scene, has been full of uneasy gestures; leaping with incredible swiftness from the shelter of the screen*]. Sir!

ROSAMUND [*pushing Gerald quickly away*]. Gerald!

JAMES. May I inquire, sir, what is the precise significance of this attitudinising? [*Gerald has scarcely yet abandoned his amorous pose, but now does so quickly*]. Are we in the middle of a scene from "Romeo and Juliet," or is this 9:30 A. M. in the nineteenth century? If Miss Fife had played the "Moonlight Sonata" to you, or looked at you as Madge does, there might perhaps have been some shadow of an excuse for your extraordinary and infamous conduct. But since she has performed neither of these feats of skill, I fail to grasp — I say I fail to grasp — er —

GERALD [*slowly recovering from an amazement which has rendered him mute*]. Rosie, a man concealed in your apartment! But perhaps it is the piano-tuner. I am willing to believe the best.

ROSAMUND. Let me introduce Mr. James Brett, my future husband. Jim, this is Gerald.

JAMES. I have gathered as much. [*The men bow stiffly.*]

ROSAMUND [*dreamily*]. Poor, poor Gerald! [*Her tone is full of feeling. James is evidently deeply affected by it. He walks calmly and steadily to the table and picks up the revolver.*]

GERALD. Sir, that tool is mine.

JAMES. Sir, the fact remains that it is an engine of destruction, and that I intend to use it. Rosamund, the tone in which you uttered those three words, "Poor, poor Gerald!" convinces me, a keen observer of symptoms, that I no longer possess your love. Without your love, life to me is meaningless. I object to anything meaningless — even a word. I shall therefore venture to deprive myself of life. Good-by! [*To Gerald.*] Sir, I may see you later. [*Raises the revolver to his temples.*]

ROSAMUND (*appealing to Gerald to interfere*]. Gerald.

GERALD. Mr. Brett, I repeat that that revolver is mine. It would be a serious breach of good manners if you used it without my consent, a social solecism of which I believe you, as a friend of Miss Fife's, to be absolutely incapable. Still, as the instrument happens to be in your hand, you may use it — but not on yourself. Have the goodness, sir, to aim at me. I could not permit myself to stand in the way of another's happiness, as I should do if I continued to exist. At the same time I have conscientious objections to suicide. You will therefore do me a service by aiming straight. Above all things, don't hit Miss Fife. I merely mention it because I perceive that you are unaccustomed to the use of firearms. [*Folds his arms.*]

JAMES. Rosamund, *do* you love me?

ROSAMUND. My Jim!

JAMES [*deeply moved*]. The possessive pronoun convinces me that you do. [*Smiling blandly.*] Sir, I will grant your most reasonable demand. [*Aims at Gerald.*]

ROSAMUND [*half shrieking*]. I don't love you if you shoot Gerald.

JAMES. But, my dear, this is irrational. He has asked me to shoot him, and I have as good as promised to do so.

ROSAMUND [*entreating*]. James, in two hours we are to be married . . . Think of the complications.

GERALD. Married! To-day! Then I withdraw my request.

JAMES. Yes; perhaps it will be as well. [*Lowers revolver.*]

GERALD. I have never yet knowingly asked a friend, even an acquaintance, to shoot me on his wedding-day, and I will not begin now. Moreover, now I come to think of it, the revolver wasn't loaded. Mr. Brett, I inadvertently put you in a ridiculous position. I apologize.

JAMES. I accept the apology. [*The general tension slackens. Both the men begin to whistle gently, in the effort after unconcern.*]

ROSAMUND. Jim, will you oblige me by putting that revolver down somewhere. I know it isn't loaded; but so many people have been killed by guns that weren't loaded that I should feel safer . . . [*He puts it down on the table.*] Thank you!

JAMES [*picking up letter*]. By the way, here's that letter that came just now. Aren't you going to open it? The

writing seems to me to be something like Lottie Dickinson's.

ROSAMUND [*taking the letter*]. It isn't Lottie's; it's her sister's. [*Stares at envelope.*] I know what it is. I *know* what it is. Lottie is ill, or dead, or something, and can't come and be a witness at the wedding. I'm sure it's that. Now, if she's dead we can't *be* married to-day; it wouldn't be decent. And it's frightfully unlucky to have a wedding postponed. Oh, but there isn't a black border on the envelope, so she can't be *dead*. And yet perhaps it was so sudden they hadn't time to buy mourning stationery! This is the result of your coming here this morning. I felt sure something would happen. Didn't I tell you so?

JAMES. No, you didn't, my dear. But why don't you open the letter?

ROSAMUND. I am opening it as fast as I can. [*Reads it hurriedly.*] There! I said so! Lottie fell off her bicycle last night, and broke her ankle — won't be able to stir for a fortnight — in great pain — hopes it won't *inconvenience* us!

JAMES. Inconvenience! I must say I regard it as very thoughtless of Lottie to go bicycling the very night before our wedding. Where did she fall off?

ROSAMUND. Sloane Street.

JAMES. That makes it positively criminal. She always falls off in Sloane Street. She makes a regular practice of it. I have noticed it before.

ROSAMUND. Perhaps she did it on purpose.

JAMES. Not a doubt of it!

ROSAMUND. She doesn't want us to get married!

JAMES. I have sometimes suspected that she had a certain tenderness for me. [*Endeavoring to look meek.*]

ROSAMUND. The cat!

JAMES. By no means. Cats are never sympathetic. She is. Let us be just before we are jealous.

ROSAMUND. Jealous! My dear James! Have you noticed how her skirts hang?

JAMES. Hang her skirts!

ROSAMUND. You wish to defend her?

JAMES. On the contrary; it was I who first accused her. [*Gerald, to avoid the approaching storm, seeks the shelter of the screen, sits down, and taking some paper from his pocket begins thoughtfully to write.*]

ROSAMUND. My dear James, let me advise you to keep quite, quite calm. You are a little bit upset.

JAMES. I am a perfect cucumber. But I can hear you breathing.

ROSAMUND. If you are a cucumber, you are a very indelicate cucumber. I'm not breathing more than is necessary to sustain life.

JAMES. Yes, you are; and what's more you'll cry in a minute if you don't take care. You're getting worked up.

ROSAMUND. No, I shan't. [*Sits down and cries.*]

JAMES. What did I tell you? Now perhaps you will inform me what we are quarreling about, because I haven't the least idea.

ROSAMUND [*through her sobs*]. I do think it's horried of Lottie. We can't be married with one witness. And I didn't want to be married at a registry office at all.

JAMES. My pet, we can easily get another witness. As for the registry office, it was yourself who proposed it, as a way out of a difficulty. I'm High and you're Low —

ROSAMUND. I'm not Low; I'm Broad, or else Evangelical.

JAMES [*beginning calmly again*]. I'm High and you're Broad, and there was a serious question about candles and a genuflexion, and so we decided on the registry office, which, after all, is much cheaper.

ROSAMUND [*drying her tears, and putting on a saintly expression*]. Well, anyhow, James, we will consider our engagement at an end.

JAMES. This extraordinary tiff has lasted long enough, Rosie. Come and be kissed.

ROSAMOND [*with increased saintliness*]. You mistake me, James. I am not quarreling. I am not angry.

JAMES. Then you have ceased to love me?

ROSAMUND. I adore you passionately. But we can never marry. Do you not perceive the warnings against such a course? First of all you come here — drawn by some mysterious, sinister impulse — in breach of all etiquette. That was a Sign.

JAMES. A sign of what?

ROSAMUND. Evil. Then you find that postcard, to remind me of a forgotten episode.

JAMES. Damn the postcard! I wish I'd never picked it up.

ROSAMUND. Hush! Then comes this letter about Lottie.

JAMES. Damn that, too!

ROSAMUND [*sighs*]. Then Gerald arrives.

JAMES. Damn him, too! By the way, where is he?

GERALD [*coming out from behind the screen*]. Sir, if you want to influence my future state by means of a blasphemous expletive, let me beg you to do it when ladies are not present. There are certain prayers which should only be uttered in the smoking-room. [*The two men stab each other with their eyes.*]

JAMES. I respectfully maintain, Mr. O'Mara, that you had no business to call on my future wife within three hours of her wedding, and throw her into such a condition of alarm and unrest that she doesn't know whether she is going to get married or not.

GERALD. Sir! How in the name of Heaven was I to guess —

ROSAMUND [*rising, with an imperative gesture*]. Stop! Sit down, both. James [*who hesitates*], this is the last request I shall ever make of you. [*He sits*]. Let me speak. Long ago, from a mistaken motive of kindness, I gave this poor boy [*pointing to Gerald*] to understand that I loved him; that any rate I should love him in time. Supported by that assurance, he existed for four years through the climatic terrors of a distant isle. I, pampered with all the superfluities of civilization, forgot this noble youth in his exile. I fell selfishly in love. I promised to marry . . . while he, with nothing to assuage the rigors —

JAMES. Pardon me, there was Evelyn's "Moonlight Sonata," not to mention Madge's eyes.

ROSAMUND. You jest, James, but the jest is untimely. Has he not himself said that these doubtless excellent young women were in fact nothing to him, that it was *my* image which he kept steadfastly in his heart?

GERALD. Ye — es, of course, Rosie.

ROSAMUND [*chiefly to James*]. The sight of this poor youth fills me with sorrow and compunction and shame. For it reminds me that four years ago I lied to him.

GERALD. It was awfully good of you, you know.

ROSAMUND. That is beside the point. At an earlier period of this unhappy morning, James, you asseverated that you could not dream of getting married with a lie on your lips. Neither can I. James, I love you to madness. [*Takes his inert hand, shakes it, and drops it again.*] Good-by, James! Henceforth we shall be strangers. My duty is towards Gerald.

GERALD. But if you love *him?*

ROSAMUND. With a good woman, conscience comes first, love second. In time I shall learn to love *you.* I was always quick at lessons. Gerald, take me. It is the only way by which I can purge my lips of the lie uttered four years ago. [*Puts her hands on Gerald's shoulders.*]

JAMES. In about three-quarters of an hour you will regret this, Rosamund Fife.

ROSAMUND. One never regrets a good action.

GERALD. Oh! well! I say . . . [*inarticulate with embarrassment*].

ROSAMUND [*after a pause*]. James, we are waiting.

JAMES. What for?

ROSAMUND. For you to go.

JAMES. Don't mind me. You forget that I am in the War Office, and accustomed to surprising situations.

GERALD. Look here, Rosie. It's awfully good of you, and you're doing me a frightfully kind turn; but I can't accept it, you know. It wouldn't do. Kindness spoils my character.

JAMES. Yes, and think of the shock to the noble youth.

GERALD. I couldn't permit such a sacrifice.

ROSAMUND. To a good woman life should be one long sacrifice.

GERALD. Yes, that's all very well, and I tell you, Rosie, I'm awfully obliged to you. Of course I'm desperately in love with you. That goes without saying. But I also must sacrifice myself. The fact is . . . there's Madge . . .

ROSAMUND. Well?

GERALD. Well, you know what a place a steamer is, especially in calm, warm

weather. I'm afraid I've rather led her to expect. . . . The fact is, while you and Mr. Brett were having your little discussion just now, I employed the time in scribbling out a bit of a letter to her, and I rather fancy that I've struck one or two deuced good ideas in the proposal line. How's this for a novelty: "My dear Miss Madge, you cannot fail to have noticed from my behavior in your presence that I admire you tremendously?" Rather a neat beginning, eh?

ROSAMUND. But you said you loved me.

GERALD. Oh, well, so I do. You see I only state that I "admire" her. All the same I feel I'm sort of bound to her, . . . you see how I'm fixed. I should much prefer, of course . . .

JAMES. To a good man life should be one long sacrifice.

GERALD. Exactly, sir.

ROSAMUND [*steadying herself and approaching James*]. Jim, my sacrifice is over. It was a terrible ordeal, and nothing but a strict sense of duty could have supported me through such a trying crisis. I am yours. Lead me to the altar. I trust Gerald may be happy with this person named Madge.

JAMES. The flame of your love has not faltered?

ROSAMUND. Ah, no!

JAMES. Well, if my own particular flame hadn't been fairly robust, the recent draughts might have knocked it about a bit. You have no more sacrifices in immediate view? . . . [*She looks at him in a certain marvelous way, and he suddenly swoops down and kisses her.*] To the altar! March! Dash; we shall want another witness.

GERALD. Couldn't I serve?

ROSAMUND. You're sure it wouldn't be too much for your feelings?

GERALD. I should enjoy it. . . . I mean I shan't mind very much. Let us therefore start. If we're too soon you can watch the process at work on others, and learn how to comport yourselves. By the way, honeymoon?

JAMES. Paris. Charing Cross 1:30. Dine at Dover.

GERALD. Then you shall eat that lunch I have ordered at the Savoy.

ROSAMUND. Er — talking of lunch, as I'm hostess here, perhaps I should ask you men if you'd like a drink.

JAMES AND GERALD [*looking hopefully at each other*]. Well, yes.

ROSAMUND. I have some beautiful lemonade.

JAMES AND GERALD [*still looking at each other, but with a different expression*]. Oh, that will be delightful! [*Lemonade and glasses produced.*]

GERALD. I drink to the happy pair.

ROSAMUND [*a little sinister*]. And I — to Madge.

JAMES. And I — to a good woman — Mrs. Pet [*looking at her fixedly*]. All men like a good woman, but she shouldn't be too good — it's a strain on the system. [*General consumption of lemonade, the men bravely swallowing it down. Rosamund rests her head on James's shoulder.*]

ROSAMUND. It occurs to me, Gerald, you only ordered lunch for two at the Savoy.

GERALD. Well, that's right. By that time you and James, if I may call him so, will be one, and me makes two.

[*Curtain.*]

THE LITTLE STONE HOUSE

A Play

By George Calderon

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The Little Stone House is founded on a story by the same author, published anonymously some years ago in *Temple Bar*.

The agents for amateur rights in this play are Messrs. Samuel French, 28 West 38th Street, New York, and Joseph Williams, Ltd., 32 Great Portland Street, London, from whom a license to play it in public must be obtained.

It was first performed for the Stage Society at the Aldwych Theatre, London, January 29, 1911, with the following cast:

Praskóvya, *a lodging-house keeper*.....*Mrs. Saba Raleigh*
Varvára, *her servant* .....*Miss Eily Malyon*
Astéryi, *a lodger*.....*Mr. Franklin Dyall*
Fomá, *a lodger* .....*Mr. Stephen T. Ewart*
Spiridón, *a stonemason*.....*Mr. Leon M. Lion*
A Stranger .....*Mr. O. P. Heggie*
A Corporal .....*Mr. E. Cresfan*

Produced by Mr. Kenelm Foss.
Scene: *Small provincial town in Russia.*

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THE LITTLE STONE HOUSE

A Play

By George Calderon

[*Praskóvya's sitting-room. Street door in porch and a curtainless window at the back. It is night; the light of an oil-lamp in the street dimly shows snow-covered houses and falling snow. The room is plainly furnished: a bed, a curtain on a cord, some books, eikons on a shelf in the corner with a wick in a red glass bowl burning before them, paper flowers, and Easter eggs on strings. A photograph of a man of twenty hangs by the eikons. There are doors to kitchen and to the lodgers' rooms.*

Varvára is discovered sitting by a lamp darning stockings.

There is an atmosphere of silence, solitude, and Russian monotony. The clock ticks. A man is seen passing in the street; his feet make no sound on the snowy ground. There is the sound of a concertina and a man who laughs in the distance out of doors. Then silence again.

Enter Astéryi, stout and lazy; gray hair thrown untidily back, a rough beard. He is in slippers and dirty dressing-gown, with a big case full of Russian cigarettes in his pocket.]

Ast. Is Praskóvya Petróvna not at home?

Var. [*rising*]. She is not at home, Astéryi Ivanovitch. She has gone to Vespers at St. Pantaléimon's in the Marsh. It is the festival of the translation of St. Pantaléimon's relics. [*Varvára sits again. Astéryi walks to and fro smoking a cigarette.*] Will you not have your game of patience as usual?

Ast. Without Praskóvya Petróvna?

Var. She would be sorry if you missed your game because she was late. You can play again when she returns; she likes to watch you.

Ast. Very well.

[*Varvára gets a pack of cards. Astéryi sits at a table at one side and plays.*]

Var. Shall I prepare the samovar?

Ast. Not yet; I will wait. How greasy these cards are [*laying out a patience*].

Var. No wonder, Astéryi Ivanovitch. It is two years since you bought this pack.

A Voice [*without*]. Varvára! Varvára! There is no water in my jug.

Ast. There is one of the lodgers calling you.

Var. It is the schoolmaster.

Ast. Better not keep him waiting; he is an angry man.

Var. I will go. Excuse me, please.

[*Exit Varvára. The clock ticks again. Astéryi pauses and meditates, then murmurs, "Oh, Hóspodi!" as if in surprise at being so terribly bored. The concertina plays a few notes. A knock at the street door.*]

Ast. Who's there? Come in, come in!

[*Enter Spiridón, a man with a cringing, crafty manner, in a sheepskin coat with snow on it. He stands by the door, facing the eikon, crossing himself with large gestures and bowing very low towards it.*]

Spir. [*looking round*]. Good-day, sir, good-day. [*Crossing himself again.*] May the holy saints preserve all in this house.

Ast. Ah! it's you, Spiridón?

Spir. Yes, sir. It is Spiridón the stonemason.

Ast. What brings you here, Spiridón?

Spir. Is Praskóvya Petróvna not at home?

Ast. No, she has gone to Vespers at St. Pantaléimon's in the Marsh.

Spir. The service is late to-night.

Ast. Yes. . . . You are a hard man, Spiridón.

Spir. Me, sir!

Ast. And you lose money by your hardness. Praskóvya Petróvna is a poor woman. For years she has been saving up money to build a stone house over the grave of her son in the Tróitski Cemetery. You say that you will build it for 500 roubles, but you ask too much. By starving herself and pinching in every way she has saved up 400 roubles at last, and if you were a wise man you would accept it. For see, she is old; if she starve herself to save up another 100 roubles she will be dead before she has got it; her money will be sent back to her village or it will go into the pocket of some official, and you will not have the tomb-house to build at all.

Spir. I have thought of all these things, Astéryi Ivanovitch, since you last spoke to me about it. And I said to myself: Astéryi Ivanovitch is perhaps right; it is not only Praskóvya Petróvna who is old; I myself am old also, and may die before she has saved up money enough. But it is very hard to work and be underpaid. Good Valdai stone is expensive and hard to cut, and workmen nowadays ask for unholy wages. Still, I said to myself, a tomb-house for her son — it is a God-fearing work: and I have resolved to make the sacrifice. I have come to tell her I will consent to build it for 400 roubles.

Ast. You have done rightly. You are an honest man, and God and St. Nicholas will perhaps save your soul.

[*Enter Fomá in cap and great-coat from the door to the lodgers' rooms.*]

Fomá. Good-evening, Astéryi Ivanovitch. Is Pravóvya not at home?

Ast. No, she is at Vespers.

Fomá. I come in and find my stove smoking. [*Taking off his coat.*] I wished to ask her permission to sit here awhile to escape a headache. Who is this? Ah, Spiridón. And by what miracle does Astéryi Ivanovitch hope that God and St. Nicholas will save your soul?

Ast. He has consented to build Praskóvya Petróvna the tomb-house over Sasha's grave for 400 roubles instead of 500.

Fomá. That is good! She will be glad to hear the news, and shake hands on the bargain, and christen the earnest-money with vodka.

Spir. The earnest-money? Ah no, sir, there can be no earnest-money. The whole sum of money must be paid at once. I am a poor man. I must pay the quarryman for the stone; my workmen cannot live on air.

Ast. If she has the money she will pay you.

Fomá. Well, if there is to be no earnest-money, at least we will have the vodka. Vodka is always good.

Ast. [*to Spiridón*]. Sit down and wait till she returns. She will not be long.

Spir. No, no; I will come again in an hour. I have to go to my brother-in-law two streets away. [*Crossing himself before the eikons.*] I will come again as I return.

[*The tap of drums in the street.*]

Ast. Why are they beating drums?

Fomá. It is a patrol passing.

Spir. The soldiers are very watchful to-day.

Fomá. It is because the Empress comes this way to-morrow on her journey to Smolensk.

Spir. They have arrested many suspicious people. All those who have no passports are being sent away to Siberia.

Fomá. Ah! poor creatures! [*A patrol of soldiers passes the window quietly*].

Spir. Why should you say "poor creatures"? If they were honest men they would not be without passports. Good-evening.

Fomá. Wait till they have gone.

Spir. We honest men have nothing to fear from them. Good-evening. I will return again in an hour. [*Exit Spiridón.*]

Fomá. How glad Praskóvya will be.

Ast. Say nothing of this to any one. We will keep it as a surprise.

[*Enter Varvára.*]

Fomá. Varvára, my pretty child, fetch the bottle of vodka from my room.

Var. Vodka in here? Praskóvya Petróvna will be angry.

Fomá. No, she will not be angry; she will be glad. [*Exit Varvára.*] Do you play patience here every night?

Ast. Every night for more than twenty years.

FOMÁ. What is it called?

AST. It is called the Wolf!

FOMÁ. Does it ever come out?

AST. It has come out twice. The first time I found a purse in the street which somebody had lost. The second time the man above me at the office died, and I got his place.

FOMÁ. It brings good luck then?

AST. To me at least.

FOMÁ. How glad Praskóvya Petróvna will be!

[*Enter Varvára with vodka bottle, which she sets on a table; no one drinks from it yet.*]

VAR. Do you not want to drink tea?

FOMÁ. Very much, you rogue.

VAR. Then I will set the samovar for both of you in here. [*She gets out tumblers, lemon and sugar.*]

AST. I did wrong in moving the seven.

FOMÁ. Put it back then.

AST. It is too late. Once it has been moved, it must not be put back.

[*Enter Praskóvya from the street hurriedly with a lantern.*]

PRAS. [*crossing herself*]. Hóspodi Bózhe moy!

VAR. [*running to her, frightened*]. Have you seen *him* again?

PRAS. [*agitated*]. I do not know. There seemed to be men standing everywhere in the shadows. . . . Good-evening, Fomá Ilyitch, good-evening, Astéryi Ivanovitch.

[*Varvára goes out, and brings in the samovar.*]

FOMÁ. I have been making myself at home; my stove smoked.

PRAS. Sit down, sit down! What ceremony! Why should you not be here? And vodka too? What is the vodka for?

AST. I will tell you when I have finished my patience. [*They all drink tea.*]

PRAS. So you are playing already.

AST. If it comes out, the good luck that it brings shall be for you!

PRAS. For me? [*They all watch Astéryi playing.*] The knave goes on the queen. [*A pause.*]

FOMÁ. That is unfortunate.

VAR. You should not have moved the ten. [*A pause.*]

AST. That will be better. [*A pause.*]

PRAS. How brightly the eikon lamp burns before the portrait of my boy.

VAR. It does indeed.

PRAS. It is the new fire from the Candlemas taper.

FOMÁ. It is the new *oil* that makes it burn brightly.

PRAS. [*crossing herself*]. Nonsense! it is the new fire.

FOMÁ. Did ever one hear such stuff? She put out the lamp at Candlemas, and lighted it anew from the taper which she brought home from the midnight service, from the new fire struck by the priest with flint and steel; and now she thinks that is the reason why it burns so brightly.

VAR. Is that not so then, Astéryi Ivanovitch?

AST. Oh, Fomá Ilyitch is a chemist; he can tell you what fire is made of.

FOMÁ. So you have been all the way to St. Pantaléimon's in the Marsh? Oh, piety, thy name is Praskóvya Petróvna! Not a person can hold the most miserably little service in the remotest corner of the town but you smell it out and go to it.

VAR. It is a Christian deed, Fomá Ilyitch.

AST. Now I can get at the ace.

VAR. [*to Praskóvya*]. I must get your supper. [*She gets a plate of meat from a cupboard.*]

FOMÁ. And on All Souls' Day she brought home holy water in a bottle and sprinkled the rooms of all the lodgers. The schoolmaster was very angry. You spotted the cover of his Greek Lexicon. He says it is a pagan custom, come down to us from the ancient Scythians.

PRAS. I do not like to hear jokes about sacred things. One may provoke Heaven to anger.

AST. Now I get all this row off.

FOMÁ. You are always afraid of offending Heaven.

PRAS. Of course I am. Think what I have at stake. For you it is only a little thing. You have a life of your own on earth; I have none. I have been as good as dead for twenty years, and the only thing that I desire is to get safely to heaven to join my son who is there.

FOMÁ. We all wish to get to heaven.

PRAS. Not so much as I do. If I were in hell it is not the brimstone that would matter; it would be to know that I should not see my son. [*Fomá nods*].

AST. I believe it is coming out.

[*They all concentrate their attention eagerly on the patience.*]

VAR. The six and the seven go. Saints preserve us! and the eight. [*She takes up a card to move it.*]

AST. No, not that one; leave that.

VAR. Where did it come from?

AST. From here.

PRAS. No, from there.

VAR. It was from here.

AST. It is all the same.

FOMÁ. It will go.

PRAS. And the knave from off this row.

VAR. The Wolf is going out!

PRAS. It is seven years since it went out.

FOMÁ. Seven years?

AST. It is out!

PRAS. It is done!

VAR. [*clapping her hands*]. Hooray!

AST. [*elated*]. Some great good fortune is going to happen.

VAR. What can it be? [*A pause.*]

PRAS. And what is the vodka for?

AST. The vodka?

PRAS. You promised to tell me when the patience was done.

AST. How much money have you saved up for the house on Sasha's tomb?

PRAS. Four hundred and six roubles and a few kopecks.

AST. And Spiridón asks for 500 roubles?

PRAS. Five hundred roubles.

AST. What if he should lower his price?

PRAS. He will not lower his price.

AST. What if he should say that he would take 450 roubles?

PRAS. Why, if I went without food for a year . . . [*Laughing at herself.*] If one could but live without food!

AST. What if he should say that he would take 420 roubles?

PRAS. Astéryi Ivanovitch, you know the proverb — the elbow is near, but you cannot bite it. I am old and feeble. I want it now, now, now. Shall I outlive the bitter winter? A shelter to sit in and talk to my son. A monument worthy of such a saint.

AST. Spiridón has been here.

PRAS. Spiridón has been here? What did he say? Tell me!

AST. He will build it for 400 roubles.

VAR. For 400 roubles!

AST. He will return soon to strike a bargain.

PRAS. Is it true?

AST. As true as that I wear the cross.

PRAS. Oh, all the holy saints be praised! Sláva Tebyé Hóspodi! [*Kneeling before the eikons.*] Oh, my darling Sasha, we will meet in a fine house, you and I, face to face. [*She prostrates herself three times before the eikons.*]

VAR. Then this is the good luck.

AST. No, this cannot be what the cards told us; for this had happened already before the Wolf came out.

VAR. Then there is something else to follow?

AST. Evidently.

VAR. What can it be?

AST. To-morrow perhaps we shall know.

PRAS. [*rising*]. And in a month I shall have my tomb-house finished, for which I have been waiting twenty years! A little stone house safe against the rain. [*Smiling and eager.*] There will be a tile stove which I can light: in the middle a stone table and two chairs — one for me and one for my boy when he comes and sits with me, and . . .

VAR. [*at the window, shrieking*]. Ah! Heaven defend us!

PRAS. What is it?

VAR. The face! the face!

PRAS. The face again?

FOMÁ. What face?

VAR. The face looked in at the window!

AST. Whose face?

VAR. It is the man that we have seen watching us in the cemetery.

PRAS. [*crossing herself*]. Oh, Heaven preserve me from this man!

FOMÁ [*opening the street door*]. There is nobody there.

AST. This is a false alarm.

FOMÁ. People who tire their eyes by staring at window-panes at night often see faces looking in through them.

PRAS. Oh, Hóspodi!

AST. Spiridón will be returning soon. Have you the money ready?

PRAS. The money? Yes, yes! I will get it ready. It is not here. Come, Varvára. [*They put on coats and shawls.*]

AST. If it is in the bank we must wait till the daytime.

PRAS. My money in the bank? I am not so foolish. [*She lights the lantern.*] Get the spade, Varvára. [*Varvára goes out and fetches a spade.*] It is buried in the field, in a place that no one knows but myself.

AST. Are you not afraid to go out?

PRAS. Afraid? No, I am not afraid.

FOMÁ. But your supper — you have not eaten your supper.

PRAS. How can I think of supper at such a moment?

FOMÁ. No supper? Oh, what a wonderful thing is a mother's love!

PRAS. [*to Astéryi and Fomá*]. Stay here till we return.

VAR. [*drawing back*]. I am afraid, Praskóvya Petróvna.

PRAS. Nonsense, there is nothing to fear.

FOMÁ [*throwing his coat over his back*]. I will go with you to the corner of the street.

AST. [*shuffling the cards*]. I must try one for myself.

FOMÁ [*mockingly*]. What's the use? It will never come out.

AST. [*cheerfully*]. Oh, it never does to be discouraged.

[*Exeunt Praskóvya, Varvára, and Fomá. Astéryi plays patience. Everything is silent and monotonous again. The clock ticks.*]

FOMÁ [*reënters, dancing and singing roguishly to the tune of the Russian folk-song, "Vo sadú li v vogoróde"*]:

In the shade there walked a maid
As fair as any flower,
Picking posies all of roses
For to deck her bower.

AST. Don't make such a noise.

FOMÁ. I can't help it. I'm gay. I have a sympathetic soul. I rejoice with Praskóvya Petróvna. I think she is mad, but I rejoice with her.

AST. So do I; but I don't disturb others on that account.

FOMÁ. Come, old grumbler, have a mouthful of vodka. [*Melodramatically.*] A glass of wine with Cæsar Borgia! [*Singing.*]

As she went adown the bent
She met a merry fellow,
He was drest in all his best
In red and blue and yellow.

So he was a saint, was he, that son of hers? Well, well, of what advantage is that? Saints are not so easy to love as sinners. You and I are not saints, are we, Astéryi Ivanovitch?

AST. I do not care to parade my halo in public.

FOMÁ. Oh, as for me, I keep mine in a box under the bed; it only frightens people. Do you think he would have remained a saint all this time if he had lived?

AST. Who can say?

FOMÁ. Nonsense! He would have become like the rest of us. Then why make all this fuss about him? Why go on for twenty years sacrificing her own life to a fantastic image?

AST. Why not, if it please her to do so?

FOMÁ. Say what you please, but all the same she is mad; yes, Praskóvya is mad.

AST. We call every one mad who is faithful to their ideas. If people think only of food and money and clothing we call them sane, but if they have ideas beyond those things we call them mad. I envy Praskóvya. Praskóvya has preserved in her old age what I myself have lost. I, too, had ideas once, but I have been unfaithful to them; they have evaporated and vanished.

FOMÁ. What ideas were these?

AST. Liberty! Political regeneration!

FOMÁ. Ah, yes; you were a sad revolutionary once, I have been told.

AST. I worshiped Liberty, as Praskóvya worships her Sasha. But I have lived my ideals down in the dull routine of my foolish, aimless life as an office hack, a clerk in the District Council, making copies that no one will ever see of documents that no one ever wants to read. . . . Suddenly there comes the Revolution; there is fighting in the streets; men raise the red flag; blood flows. I might go forth and strike a blow for that Liberty which I loved twenty years ago. But no, I have become indifferent. I do not care who wins, the Government or the Revolutionaries; it is all the same to me.

FOMÁ. You are afraid. One gets timid as one gets older.

AST. Afraid? No. What have I to be afraid of? Death is surely not so

much worse than life? No, it is because my idea is dead and cannot be made to live again, while Praskóvya, whose routine as a lodging-house keeper is a hundred times duller than mine, is still faithful to her old idea. Let us not call her mad; let us rather worship her as something holy, for her fidelity to an idea in this wretched little town where ideas are as rare as white ravens.

Fomá. She has no friends to love?

Ast. She has never had any friends; she needed none.

Fomá. She has relatives, I suppose?

Ast. None.

Fomá. What mystery explains this solitude?

Ast. If there is a mystery it is easily guessed. It is an everyday story; the story of a peasant woman betrayed and deserted by a nobleman. She came with her child to this town; and instead of sinking, set herself bravely to work, to win a living for the two of them. She was young and strong then; her work prospered with her.

Fomá. And her son was worthy of her love?

Ast. He was a fine boy — handsome and intelligent. By dint of the fiercest economy she got him a nobleman's education; sent him to the Gymnase, and thence, when he was eighteen, to the University of Moscow. Praskóvya herself cannot read or write, but her boy . . . the books on that shelf are the prizes which he won. She thought him a pattern of all the virtues.

Fomá. Aha! now we're coming to it! So he was a sinner after all?

Ast. We are none of us perfect. His friends were ill-chosen. The hard-earned money that Praskóvya thought was spent on University expenses went on many other things — on drink, on women, and on gambling. But he did one good thing — he hid it all safely from his mother. I helped him in that. Together we kept her idea safe through a difficult period. And before he was twenty it was all over — he was dead.

Fomá. Yes, he was murdered by some foreigner, I know.

Ast. By Adámek, a Pole.

Fomá. And what was the motive of the crime?

Ast. It was for money. By inquiries which I made after the trial I ascertained that this Adámek was a bad character and an adventurer, who used to entice students to his rooms to drink and gamble with him. Sasha had become an intimate friend of his; and it was even said that they were partners in cheating the rest. Anyhow, there is no doubt that at one time or another they had won considerable sums at cards, and disputed as to the ownership of them. The last thing that was heard of them, they bought a sledge with two horses and set out saying they were going to Tula. On the road Adámek murdered the unfortunate boy. The facts were all clear and indisputable. There was no need to search into the motives. The murderer fell straight into the hands of the police. The District Inspector, coming silently along the road in his sledge, suddenly saw before him the boy lying dead by the roadside, and the murderer standing over him with the knife in his hand. He arrested him at once; there was no possibility of denying it.

Fomá. And it was quite clear that his victim was Sasha?

Ast. Quite clear. Adámek gave intimate details about him, such as only a friend of his could have known, which put his identity beyond a doubt. When the trial was over the body was sent in a coffin to Praskóvya Petróvna, who buried it here in the Tróitski Cemetery.

Fomá. And the Pole?

Ast. He was sent to penal servitude for life to the silver mines of Siberia.

Fomá. So Praskóvya is even madder than I thought. Her religion is founded on a myth. Her life is an absurd deception.

Ast. No; she has created something out of nothing; that is all.

Fomá. In your place I should have told her the truth.

Ast. No.

Fomá. Anything is better than a lie.

Ast. There is no lie in it. Praskóvya's idea and Sasha's life are two independent things. A statement of fact may be true or false; but an idea need only be clear and definite. That is all that matters. [*There is a tapping at the door; the latch is lifted, and the Stranger peeps in.*] Come in, come in!

[*Enter the Stranger, ragged and degraded. He looks about the room, dazed by the light, and fixes his attention on Astéryi.*]

Who are you? What do you want?

STRANGER. I came to speak to you.

AST. To speak to me?

FOMÁ. Take off your cap. Do you not see the eikons?

AST. What do you want with me?

STRANGER. Only a word, Astéryi Ivanovitch.

AST. How have you learnt my name?

FOMÁ. Do you know the man?

AST. No.

STRANGER. You do not know me?

AST. No.

STRANGER. Have you forgotten me, Astéryi Ivanovitch?

AST. [*almost speechless*]. Sasha!

FOMÁ. What is it? You look as if you had seen a ghost.

AST. A ghost? There are no such things as ghosts. Would that it were a ghost. It is Sasha.

FOMÁ. Sasha?

AST. It is Praskóvya's son alive.

FOMÁ. Praskóvya's son?

SASHA. You remember me now, Astéryi Ivanovitch.

AST. How have you risen from the dead? How have you come back from the grave — you who were dead and buried these twenty years and more?

SASHA. I have not risen from the dead. I have not come back from the grave; but I have come a long, long journey.

AST. From where?

SASHA. From Siberia.

FOMÁ. From Siberia?

SASHA. From Siberia.

AST. What were you doing in Siberia?

SASHA. Do you not understand, Astéryi Ivanovitch? I am a criminal.

AST. Ah!

SASHA. A convict, a felon. I have escaped and come home.

AST. Of what crime have you been guilty?

SASHA. Do not ask me so many questions, but give me something to eat.

AST. But tell me this . . .

SASHA. There is food here. I smelt it as I came in. [*He eats the meat with his fingers ravenously, like a wild beast.*]

FOMÁ. It is your mother's supper.

SASHA. I do not care whose supper it is. I am ravenous. I have had nothing to eat all day.

FOMÁ. Can this wild beast be Praskóvya's son?

SASHA. We are all wild beasts if we are kept from food. Ha! and vodka, too! [*helping himself*].

AST. Are you a convict, a felon, Sasha? You who were dead? Then we have been deceived for many years.

SASHA. Have you?

AST. Some other man was murdered twenty years ago. The murderer said that it was you.

SASHA. Ah, he said that it was me, did he?

AST. Why did Adámek say that it was you?

SASHA. Can you not guess? Adámek murdered no one.

AST. He murdered no one? But he was condemned.

SASHA. He was never condemned.

AST. Never condemned? Then what became of him?

SASHA. He died . . . Do you not understand? It was I who killed Adámek.

AST. You!

SASHA. We had quarreled. We were alone in a solitary place. I killed him and stood looking down at him with the knife in my hand dripping scarlet in the snow, frightened at the sudden silence and what I had done. And while I thought I was alone, I turned and saw the police-officer with his revolver leveled at my head. Then amid the confusion and black horror that seized on me, a bright thought shot across my mind. Adámek had no relatives, no friends; he was an outcast. Stained with his flowing blood, I exchanged names with him; that's the old heroic custom of blood-brotherhood, you know. I named myself Adámek; I named my victim Sasha. Ingenious, wasn't it? I had romantic ideas in those days. Adámek has been cursed for a murderer, and my memory has been honored. Alexander Petróvitch has been a hero; my mother has wept for me. I have seen her in the graveyard lamenting on my tomb; I have read my name on the cross. I hardly know whether to laugh or to cry. Evidently she loves me still.

AST. And you?

SASHA. Do I love her? No. There is no question of that. She is part of a life that was ended too long ago. I have only myself to think of now. What should I gain by loving her? Understand, I am an outlaw, an escaped convict; a word can send me back to the mines. I must hide myself, the patrols are everywhere. . . . Even here I am not safe. [*Locks the street door.*]

AST. Why have you returned? Why have you spoilt what you began so well? Having resolved twenty years ago to vanish like a dead man . . .

SASHA. Ah! if they had killed me then I would have died willingly. But after twenty years remorse goes, pity goes, everything goes; entombed in the mines, but still alive . . . I was worn out. I could bear it no longer. Others were escaping, I escaped with them.

AST. This will break her heart. She has made an angel of you. The lamp is always burning. . . .

SASHA [*going to the eikon corner with a glass of vodka in his hand*]. Aha! Alexander Nevski, my patron saint. I drink to you, my friend: but I cannot congratulate you on your work. As a guardian angel you have been something of a failure. And what is this? [*taking a photograph*]. Myself! Who would have known this for my portrait? Look at the angel child, with the soft cheeks and the pretty curly hair. How innocent and good I looked! [*bringing it down*]. And even then I was deceiving my mother. She never understood that a young man must live, he must live. We are animals first; we have instincts that need something warmer, something livelier, than the tame dull round of home. [*He throws down the photograph; Fomá replaces it.*] And even now I have no intention of dying. Yet how am I to live? I cannot work; the mines have sucked out all my strength. Has my mother any money?

AST. [*to Fomá*]. What can we do with him?

SASHA. Has my mother any money?

AST. Money? Of course not. Would she let lodgings if she had? Listen. I am a poor man myself, but I will give you ten roubles and your railway fare to go to St. Petersburg.

SASHA. St. Petersburg? And what shall I do there when I have spent the ten roubles?

AST. [*shrugging his shoulders*]. How do I know? Live there, die there, only stay away from here.

FOMÁ. What right have you to send him away? Why do you suppose that she will not be glad to see him? Let her see her saint bedraggled, and love him still — that is what true love means. You have regaled her with lies all these years; but now it is no longer possible. [*A knocking at the door.*] She is at the door.

AST. [*to Sasha*]. Come with me. [*To Fomá.*] He must go out by the other way.

FOMÁ [*stopping them*]. No, I forbid it. It is the hand of God that has led him here. Go and unlock the door. [*Astéryi shrugs his shoulders, and goes to unlock the door.*] [*To Sasha, hiding him.*] Stand here a moment till I have prepared your mother.

[*Enter Praskóvya and Varvára, carrying a box.*]

PRAS. Why is the door locked? Were you afraid without old Praskóvya to protect you? Here is the money. Now let me count it. Have you two been quarreling? There are fifty roubles in this bag, all in little pieces of silver; it took me two years.

FOMÁ. How you must have denied yourself, Praskóvna, and all to build a hut in a churchyard!

PRAS. On what better thing could money be spent?

FOMÁ. You are so much in love with your tomb-house, I believe that you would be sorry if it turned out that your son was not dead, but alive.

PRAS. Why do you say such things? You know that I should be glad. Ah! if I could but see him once again as he was then, and hold him in my arms!

FOMÁ. But he would not be the same now.

PRAS. If he were different, he would not be my son.

FOMÁ. What if all these years he had been an outcast, living in degradation?

PRAS. Who has been eating here? Who has been drinking here? Something has happened! Tell me what it is.

AST. Your son is not dead.

PRAS. Not dead? Why do you say it

so sadly? No, it is not true. I do not believe it. How can I be joyful at the news if you tell it so sadly? If he is alive, where is he? Let me see him.

AST. He is here.

[*Sasha comes forward.*]

PRAS. No, no! Tell me that that is not him . . . my son whom I have loved all these years, my son that lies in the churchyard. [*To Sasha.*] Don't be cruel to me. Say that you are not my son; you cannot be my son.

SASHA. You know that I am your son.

PRAS. My son is dead; he was murdered. I buried his body in the Tróitski Cemetery.

SASHA. But you see that I was not murdered. Touch me; feel me. I am alive. I and Adámek fought; it was not Adámek that slew *me*, it was . . .

PRAS. No, no! I want to hear no more. You have come to torment me. Only say what you want of me, anything, and I will do it, if you will leave me in peace.

SASHA. I want food and clothing; I want shelter; I must have money.

PRAS. You will go if I give you money? Yes? Say that you will go, far, far away, and never come back to tell lies. . . . But I have no money to give; I am a poor woman.

SASHA. Come, what's all this?

PRAS. No, no! I need it; I can't spare it. What I have I have starved myself to get. Two roubles, five roubles, even ten roubles I will give you, if you will go far, far away. . . .

FOMÁ. Before he can travel we must bribe some peasant to lend him his passport.

PRAS. Has he no passport then?

FOMÁ. No.

[*A knock. Enter Spiridón.*]

SPIR. Peace be on this house. May the saints watch over all of you! Astéryi Ivanovitch will have told you of my proposal.

PRAS. Yes, I have heard of it, Spiridón.

FOMÁ. Good-by, Spiridón; there is no work for you here. That is all over.

PRAS. Why do you say that that is all over?

FOMÁ. There will be no tomb-house to build.

PRAS. No tomb-house? How dare you say so? He is laughing at us, Spiridón. The tomb-house that we have planned together, with the table in the middle, and the two chairs. . . . Do not listen to him, Spiridón. At last I have money enough; let us count it together.

SASHA. Give me my share, mother!

PRAS. I have no money for you.

SASHA [*advancing*]. I must have money.

PRAS. You shall not touch it.

SASHA. I will not go unless you give me money.

PRAS. It is not mine. I have promised it all to Spiridón. Help me, Astéryi Ivanovitch; he will drive me mad! Oh, what must I do? What must I do? Is there no way, Varvára? [*Tap of drums without.*] [*To Sasha.*] Go! go! go quickly, or worse will befall you.

SASHA. I will not go and starve while you have all this money.

PRAS. Ah! Since you will have it so. . . . It is you, not I! [*Running out at the door and calling.*] Patrol! Patrol!

FOMÁ. Stop her.

VAR. Oh, Hóspodi!

PRAS. Help! Help! Come here!

FOMÁ. What have you done? What have you done?

[*Enter Corporal and Soldiers.*]

PRAS. This man is a thief and a murderer. He is a convict escaped from Siberia. He has no passport.

CORP. Is that true? Where is your passport?

SASHA. I have none.

CORP. We are looking for such men as you. Come!

SASHA. This woman is my mother.

CORP. That's her affair. You have no passport; that is enough for me. You'll soon be back on the road to the North with the rest of them.

SASHA. Woman! woman! Have pity on your son.

CORP. Come along, lad, and leave the old woman in peace.

[*Exit Sasha in custody.*]

PRAS. The Lord help me!

[*Praskóvya stumbles towards the eikons and sinks slindly before them.*]

FOMÁ [*looking after Sasha*]. Poor devil!

ASTÉRYI. What's a man compared to an idea?

[*Praskóvya rolls over, dead.*]

[*Curtain.*]

MARY'S WEDDING

A Play

By Gilbert Cannan

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MARY'S WEDDING was first produced at the Coronet Theatre, in May, 1912, with the following cast:

MARY ..... *Miss Irene Rooke*
TOM ..... *Mr. Herbert Lomas*
ANN ..... *Miss Mary Goulden*
MRS. AIREY ..... *Miss Muriel Pratt*
BILL AIREY ..... *Mr. Charles Bibby*
TWO MAIDS.
VILLAGERS AND OTHERS.

SCENE: *The Davis's Cottage.*

NOTE: There is no attempt made in the play to reproduce exactly the Westmoreland dialect, which would be unintelligible to ears coming new to it, but only to catch the rough music of it and the slow inflection of northern voices.

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MARY'S WEDDING

A Play

By Gilbert Cannan

[*The scene is the living-room in the Davis's cottage in the hill country. An old room low in the ceiling. Ann Davis is at the table in the center of the room untying a parcel. The door opens to admit Tom Davis, a sturdy quarryman dressed in his best and wearing a large nosegay.*]

Ann. Well, 'ast seed un?

Tom. Ay, a seed un. 'Im and 'is ugly face —

Ann [*untying her parcel*]. 'Tis 'er dress come just in time an' no more from the maker-up —

Tom. Ef she wouldna do it. . . .

Ann. But 'tis such long years she's been a-waitin'. . . . 'Tis long years since she bought t' dress.

Tom. An' 'tis long years she'll be a livin' wi' what she's been waitin' for; 'tis long years she'll live to think ower it and watch the thing she's taken for her man, an' long years that she'll find 'un feedin' on 'er, an' a dreary round she'll 'ave of et. . . .

Ann. Three times she 'ave come to a month of weddin', an' three times 'e 'ave broke loose and gone down to the Mortal Man an' the woman that keeps 'arf our men in drink. . . . 'Tis she is the wicked one, giving 'em score an' score again 'till they owe more than they can ever pay with a year's money.

Tom. 'Tis a fearful thing to drink. . . .

Ann. So I telled 'er in the beginnin' of it all, knowin' what like of man 'e was. An' so I telled 'er last night only.

Tom. She be set on it?

Ann. An', an' 'ere's t' pretty dress for 'er to be wedded in. . . .

Tom. What did she say?

Ann. Twice she 'ave broke wi' 'im, and twice she 'ave said that ef 'e never touched the drink fur six months she would go to be churched wi' 'im. She never 'ave looked at another man.

Tom. Ay, she be one o' they quiet ones that goes about their work an' never 'as no romantical notions but love only the more for et. There've been men come for 'er that are twice the man that Bill is, but she never looks up from 'er work at 'em.

Ann. I think she must 'a' growed up lovin' Bill. 'Tis a set thing surely.

Tom. An' when that woman 'ad 'im again an' 'ad 'im roaring drunk fur a week, she never said owt but turned to 'er work agin an' set aside the things she was makin' agin the weddin'. . . .

Ann. What did 'e say to 'er?

Tom. Nowt. 'E be 'most as chary o' words as she. 'E've got the 'ouse an' everything snug, and while 'e works 'e makes good money.

Ann. 'Twill not end, surely.

Tom. There was 'is father and two brothers all broken men by it.

[*She hears Mary on the stairs, and they are silent.*]

Ann. 'Ere's yer pretty dress, Mary.

Mary. Ay. . . . Thankye, Tom.

Tom. 'Twill be lovely for ye, my dear, an' grand. 'Tis a fine day fur yer weddin', my dear. . . .

Mary. I'll be sorry to go, Tom.

Tom. An' sorry we'll be to lose ye. . . .

Mary. I'll put the dress on.

[*She throws the frock over her arm and goes out with it.*]

Ann. Another girl would 'a' wedded him years ago in the first foolishness of it. But Mary, for all she says so little, 'as long, long thoughts that never comes to the likes o' you and me. . . . Another girl, when the day 'ad come at last, would 'a' been wild wi' the joy an' the fear o' it. . . . But Mary, she's sat on the fells under the stars, an' windin' among the

sheep. D' ye mind the nights she's been out like an old shepherd wi' t' sheep? D' ye mind the nights when she was but a lile 'un an' we found 'er out in the dawn sleepin' snug again the side o' a fat ewe?

TOM. 'Tis not like a weddin' day for 'er. . . . If she'd 'ad a new dress, now —

ANN. I said to 'er would she like a new dress; but she would have only the old 'un cut an' shaped to be in the fashion. . . . Et 'as been a strange coortin', an' 'twill be a strange life for 'em both, I'm thinkin', for there seems no gladness in 'er, nor never was, for she never was foolish an' she never was young; but she was always like there was a great weight on 'er, so as she must be about the world alone, but always she 'ave turned to the little things an' the weak, an' always she 'ad some poor sick beast for tendin' or another woman's babe to 'old to 'er breast, an' I think sometimes that 'tis only because Bill is a poor sick beast wi' a poor sick soul that she be so set on 'im.

TOM. 'E be a sodden beast wi' never a soul to be saved or damned —

ANN. 'Cept for the drink, 'e've been a good son to 'is old mother when the others 'ud 'a' left 'er to rot i' the ditch, an' 'e was the on'y one as 'ud raise a finger again his father when the owd man, God rest him, was on to 'er like a madman. Drunk or sober 'e always was on 'is mother's side.

TOM. 'Twas a fearful 'ouse that.

ANN. 'Twas wonderful that for all they did to 'er, that wild old man wi' 'is wild young sons, she outlived 'em all, but never a one could she save from the curse that was on them, an', sober, they was the likeliest men 'n Troutbeck. . . .

TOM. 'Tis when the rain comes and t' clouds come low an' black on the fells and the cold damp eats into a man's bones that the fearful thoughts come to 'im that must be drowned or 'im go mad — an' only the foreigners like me or them as 'as foreign blood new in 'em can 'old out again it; 'tis the curse o' livin' too long between two lines o' 'ills.

ANN. An' what that owd woman could never do, d'ye think our Mary'll do it? 'Im a Troutbeck man an' she a Troutbeck girl?

TOM. She've 'eld to 'er bargain an' brought 'im to it.

ANN. There's things that a maid can do that a wife cannot an' that's truth, an' shame it is to the men. [*Comes a knock at the door.*] 'Tisn't time for t' weddin' folk.

[*Tom goes to the window.*]

TOM. Gorm. 'Tis Mrs. Airey.

ANN. T' owd woman. She that 'as not been further than 'er garden-gate these ten years?

[*She goes to the door, opens it to admit Mrs. Airey, an old gaunt woman just beginning to be bent with age.*

MRS. A. Good day to you, Tom Davis.

TOM. Good day to you, Mrs. Airey.

MRS. A. Good day to you, Ann Davis.

ANN. Good day to you, Mrs. Airey. Will ye sit down?

[*She dusts a chair and Mrs. Airey sits by the fireside. She sits silent for a long while. Tom and Ann look uneasily at her and at each other.*]

MRS. A. So 'tis all ready for Bill's wedding.

TOM. Ay. 'Tis a fine day, an' the folks bid, and the sharry-bang got for to drive to Coniston, all the party of us. Will ye be coming, Mrs. Airey?

MRS. A. I'll not. [*Mrs. Airey sits silent again for long.*] Is Mary in the 'ouse?

ANN. She be upstairs puttin' on 'er weddin' dress.

MRS. A. 'Tis the sad day of 'er life. . . . They're a rotten lot an' who should know et better than me? Bill's the best of 'em, but Bill's rotten. . . . Six months is not enough, nor six years nor sixty, not while 'er stays in Troutbeck rememberin' all that 'as been an' all the trouble that was in the 'ouse along o' it, and so I've come for to say it.

ANN. She growed up lovin' Bill, and 'tis a set thing. She've waited long years. 'Tis done now, an' what they make for theirselves they make, an' 'tis not for us to go speirin' for the trouble they may make for theirselves, but only to pray that it may pass them by. . . .

MRS. A. But 'tis certain. . . . Six months is not enough, nor six years, nor sixty —

ANN. And are ye come for to tell Mary this . . .?

MRS. A. This and much more. . . .

TOM. And what 'ave ye said to Bill?

MRS. A. Nowt. There never was a

son would give 'eed to 'is mother. . . . 'Tisn't for 'im I'm thinkin', but for t' children that she's bear 'im. I 'oped, and went on 'opin' till there was no 'ope left in me, and I lived to curse the day that each one of my sons was born. John and Peter are dead an' left no child behind, and it were better for Bill also to leave no child behind. There's a day and 'alf a day o' peace and content for a woman with such a man, and there's long, long years of thinkin' on the peace and content that's gone. There's long, long years of watching the child that you've borne and suckled turn rotten, an' I say that t' birth-pangs are nowt to t' pangs that ye 'ave from the childer of such a man as Bill or Bill's father. . . . She's a strong girl an' a good girl; but there's this that is stronger than 'er.

[*Mary comes again, very pretty in her blue dress. She is at once sensible of the strangeness in Tom and Ann. She stands looking from one to the other. Mrs. Airey sits gazing into the fire.*]

MARY. Why, mother . . . 'tis kind of you to come on this morning.

MRS. A. Ay, 'tis kind of me. [*Ann steals away upstairs and Tom, taking the lead from her, goes out into the road.*] Come 'ere, my pretty.

[*Mary goes and stands by her.*]

MARY. The sun is shining and the bees all out and busy to gather in the honey.

MRS. A. 'Tis the bees as is t' wise people to work away in t' dark when t' sun is hidden, and to work away in t' sun when 'tis bright and light. 'Tis the bees as is t' wise people that takes their men an' kills 'em for the 'arm that they may do, and it's us that's the foolish ones to make soft the way of our men an' let them strut before us and lie; and 'tis us that's the foolish ones ever to give a thought to their needs that give never a one to ours.

MARY. 'Tis us that's t' glorious ones to 'elp them that is so weak, and 'tis us that's the brave and the kind ones to let them 'ave the 'ole world to play with when they will give never a thought to us that gives it t' 'em.

MRS. A. My pretty, my pretty, there's never a one of us can 'elp a man that thinks 'isself a man an' strong, poor fool, an' there's never a one of us can 'elp a man that's got a curse on 'im and is rotten through to t' bone, an' not one day can you be a 'elp to such a man as this. . . .

MARY. There's not one day that I will not try, and not one day that I will not fight to win 'im back. . .

MRS. A. The life of a woman is a sorrowful thing. . . .

MARY. For all its sorrow, 'tis a greater thing than t' life of a man . . . an' so I'll live it. . . .

MRS. A. Now you're strong and you're young.— 'Ope's with ye still and life all before ye — and so I thought when my day came, and so I did. There was a day and 'alf a day of peace and content, and there was long, long years of thinking on the peace and content that are gone. . . . Four men all gone the same road, and me left looking down the way that they are gone and seeing it all black as the pit. . . . I be a poor old woman now with never a creature to come near me in kindness, an' I was such a poor old woman before ever the 'alf of life was gone, an' so you'll be if you take my son for your man. He's the best of my sons, but I curse the day that ever he was born. . . .

MARY. There was never a man the like of Bill. If ye see 'un striding the 'ill, ye know 'tis a man by 'is strong, long stride; and if ye see 'un leapin' an' screein' down th' 'ill, ye know 'tis a man; and if we see 'un in t' quarry, ye know 'tis a strong man. . . .

MRS. A. An' if ye see 'un lyin' drunk i' the ditch, not roarin' drunk, but rotten drunk, wi' 'is face fouled an' 'is clothes mucked, ye know 'tis the lowest creature of the world.

[*Mary stands staring straight in front of her.*]

MARY. Is it for this that ye come to me to-day?

MRS. A. Ay, for this: that ye may send 'un back to 'is rottenness, for back to it 'e'll surely go when 'tis too late, an' you a poor old woman like me, with never a creature to come near ye in kindness, before ever the bloom 'as gone from your bonny cheeks, an' maybe childer that'll grow up bonny an' then be blighted for all the tenderness ye give to them; an' those days will be the worst of all — far worse than the day when ye turn for good an' all into yourself from t' man that will

give ye nowt. . . . 'Tis truly the bees as is the wise people. . . .

MARY. It's a weary waitin' that I've had, and better the day and 'alf a day of peace and content with all the long years of thinking on it than all the long, long years of my life to go on waitin' and waitin' for what has passed me by, for if he be the rottenest, meanest man in t' world that ever was made, there is no other that I can see or ever will. It is no wild foolishness that I am doing: I never was like that; but it's a thing that's growed wi' me an' is a part o' me — an' though every day o' my life were set before me now so I could see to the very end, an' every day sadder and blacker than the last, I'd not turn back. I gave 'im the bargain, years back now, and three times e' 'as failed me; but 'e sets store by me enough to do this for me a fourth time — 'Twas kind of ye to come. . . .

MRS. A. You're strong an' you're young, but there's this that's stronger than yourself —

MARY. Maybe, but 'twill not be for want o' fightin' wi' 't.

MRS. A. 'Twill steal on ye when you're weakest, an' come on ye in your greatest need. . . .

MARY. It 'as come to this day an' there is no goin' back. D' ye think I've not seed t' soft, gentle things that are given to other women, an' not envied them? D' ye think I've not seed 'em walkin' shut-eyed into all sorts o' foolishness an' never askin' for the trewth o' it, an' not envied 'em for doin' that? D' ye think I've not seed the girls I growed wi' matin' lightly an' lightly weddin', an' not envied 'em for that, they wi' a 'ouse an' babes an' me drudgin' away in t' farm me wi' my man to 'and an' only this agin 'im? D' ye think I've not been tore in two wi' wantin' to close my eyes an' walk like others into it an' never think what is to come? There's many an' many a night that I've sat there under t' stars wi' t' three counties 'afore me an' t' sea, an' t' sheep croppin', an' my own thoughts for all the comp'ny that I 'ad, an' fightin' this way an' that for to take 'up an' let 'un be so rotten as ever 'e might be; an' there's many an' many a night when the thoughts come so fast that they hurt me an' I lay pressed close to t' ground wi' me 'ands clawin' at it an' me teeth bitin' into t' ground for to get closer an' 'ide from myself; an' many a night when I sat there seein' the man as t' brave lad 'e was when I seed 'un first leapin' down the 'ill, an' knowin' that nothin' in the world, nothin' that I could do to 'un or that 'e could do 'isself, would ever take that fro' me. . . . In all my time o' my weary waitin' there 'as never been a soul that I told so much to, an' God knows there never 'as been an' never will be a time when I can tell as much to 'im. . . .

MRS. A. My pretty, my pretty, 'tis a waste an' a wicked, wicked waste. . . .

MARY. 'Tis a day an' alf a day agin never a moment. . . .

MRS. A. 'Tis that, and so 'tis wi' all o' us . . . an' so 'twill be. . . . God bless ye, my dear. . . .

[*Ann comes down. Mary is looking out of the window.*]

ANN. Ye forgot the ribbon for yer 'air, that I fetched 'specially fro' t' town.

MARY. Why, yes. Will ye tie it, Ann?

[*Ann ties the ribbon in her hair.*]

MRS. A. Pretty, my dear, oh! pretty —

MARY. I'm to walk to t' church o' Tom's arm. . .?

ANN. An' I to Tom's left; wi' the bridesmaids be'ind, an' the rest a follow'in'. . . .

[*Tom returns, followed by two girls bringing armfuls of flowers. With these they deck the room, and keep the choicest blooms for Mary. Ann and the three girls are busied with making Mary reach her most beautiful. Mrs. Airey goes. At intervals one villager and another comes to give greeting or to bring some small offering of food or some small article of clothing. Mary thanks them all with rare natural grace. They call her fine, and ejaculate remarks of admiration: "The purty bride. . . ." "She's beautiful. . . ." "'Tis a lucky lad, Bill Airey. . . ." The church bell begins to ring. . . . All is prepared and all are ready. . . . Mary is given her gloves, which she draws on — when the door is thrown open and Bill Airey lunges against the lintel of the door and stands leering. He is just sober enough to know what he is at. He*

is near tears, poor wretch. He is not horribly drunk. He stands surveying the group and they him.]

BILL. I come — I come — I — c-come for to — to — to — show — to show myself . . .

[*He turns in utter misery and goes. Mary plucks the flowers from her bosom and lets them fall to the ground; draws her gloves off her hands and lets them fall. The bell continues to ring.*]

[*Curtain.*]

THE BABY CARRIAGE

A Play

By Bosworth Crocker

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THE BABY CARRIAGE was originally produced by the Provincetown Players, New York, February 14, 1919, with the following cast:

MRS. LEZINSKY ..... *Dorothy Miller.*
MRS. ROONEY ..... *Alice Dostetter.*
MR. ROSENBLOOM ..... *W. Clay Hill.*
SOLOMON LEZINSKY ..... *O. K. Liveright.*

PLACE: *The Lezinsky Tailor Shop.*
TIME: *To-day.*

Application for the right of performing THE BABY CARRIAGE must be made to Mr. Bosworth Crocker, in care of the Society of American Dramatists and Composers, 148 West 45th Street, New York, or The Authors' League, Union Square, New York.

THE BABY CARRIAGE

A Play

By Bosworth Crocker

[The Scene *is an ordinary tailor shop two steps down from the sidewalk. Mirror on one side. Equipment third rate. Mrs. Solomon Lezinsky, alone in the shop, is examining a torn pair of trousers as Mrs. Rooney comes in.*]

Mrs. Lezinsky [*27 years old, medium height and weight, dark, attractive. In a pleased voice with a slight Yiddish accept*]. Mrs. Rooney!

Mrs. Rooney [*30 years old. A plump and pretty Irish woman*]. I only ran in for a minute to bring you these. [*Holds up a pair of roller skates and a picture book.*] Eileen's out there in the carriage. [*Both women look out at the baby-carriage in front of the window.*]

Mrs. Lezinsky. Bring her in, Mrs. Rooney. Such a beautiful child — your Eileen!

Mrs. Rooney. Can't stop — where's the kids?

Mrs. Lezinsky. The janitress takes them to the moving pictures with her Izzy.

Mrs. Rooney. You wouldn't believe the things I've run across this day, packing. [*Puts down the skates.*] I'm thinking these skates'll fit one of your lads. My Mickey — God rest his soul! — used to tear around great on them.

Mrs. Lezinsky. Fine, Mrs. Rooney! [*Examines the skates.*] But couldn't you save them for Eileen?

Mrs. Rooney. Sure, she'd be long growing up to them and they be laying by gathering the rust.

Mrs. Lezinsky. My David and Julius and Benny could die for joy with these fine skates, I tell you, Mrs. Rooney.

Mrs. Rooney. Here's an old book [*hands Mrs. Lezinsky the book*], but too good to throw away entirely.

Mrs. Lezinsky [*opens the book*]. Fine, Mrs. Rooney! Such a book with pictures in it! My Benny's wild for picture books. Julius reads, reads — always learning. Something wonderful, I tell you. Just like the papa — my Solly ruins himself with his nose always stuck in the Torah.

Mrs. Rooney. The Toro? 'Tis a book I never heard tell of.

Mrs. Lezinsky. The law and the prophets — my Solly was meant to be a rabbi once.

Mrs. Rooney. A rabbi?

Mrs. Lezinsky. You know what a rabbi is by us, Mrs. Rooney?

Mrs. Rooney. Indeed, I know what a rabbi is, Mrs. Lezinsky — a rabbi is a Jewish priest.

Mrs. Lezinsky. You don't hate the Jewish religion, Mrs. Rooney?

Mrs. Rooney. Every one has a right to their own religion. Some of us are born Jewish — like you, Mrs. Lezinsky, and some are born Catholics, like me.

Mrs. Lezinsky. Catholics like you are fine, Mrs. Rooney. Such a good neighbor! A good customer, too! Why should you move away now, Mrs. Rooney?

Mrs. Rooney. The air in the Bronx will be fine for Eileen. 'Tis a great pity you couldn't be moving there, yourself. With the fresh air and the cheap rent, 'twould be great for yourself and the boys — not to mention the baby that's coming to you.

Mrs. Lezinsky. Thank God, that don't happen for a little while yet. But in the hottest weather — maybe — some Septembers — even so late yet — ain't it, Mrs. Rooney? Always trouble by us. Such expense, too. The agent takes the rent to-day. With Solly's eyes so bad it's a blessing when we can pay the rent even. And the gas bills! So much pants pressing! See? They send us this already. [*Shows a paper.*] A notice to pay right away or they shut it off. Only ten days

overdue. Would you believe it, Mrs. Rooney? Maybe we catch up a little next month. It don't pay no longer, this business. And soon now another mouth to feed, and still my Solly sticks by his learning.

MRS. ROONEY. But he can't be a rabbi now, can he?

MRS. LEZINSKY. He can't be a rabbi now, no more, Mrs. Rooney, but such a pious man — my Solly. He must be a poor tailor, but he never gives up his learning — not for anything he gives that up. Learning's good for my David and Julius and Benny soon, but it's bad for my Solly. It leaves him no eyes for the business, Mrs. Rooney.

MRS. ROONEY. And are the poor eyes as bad as ever?

MRS. LEZINSKY. How should his eyes get better when he gives them no chance? Always he should have an operation and the operation — it don't help — maybe. [*Mrs. Rooney turns to the door.*] Must you go so quick, Mrs. Rooney? Now you move away, I never see you any more.

MRS. ROONEY. The subway runs in front of the house.

MRS. LEZINSKY. I tell you something, Mrs. Rooney: Solly couldn't keep the shop open without me. Sometimes his eyes go back on him altogether. And he should get an operation. But that costs something, I tell you, Mrs. Rooney. The doctors get rich from that. It costs something, that operation. And then, sometimes, may be it don't help.

MRS. ROONEY. 'Tis too bad, altogether. [*Looks at the baby-carriage.*] Wait a minute, Mrs. Lezinsky. [*Starts out.*]

MRS. LEZINSKY [*as Mrs. Rooney goes*]. What is it, Mrs. Rooney?

MRS. ROONEY [*just outside the door, calls out*]. Something else — I forgot. 'Tis out here in the carriage.

[*Mrs. Lezinsky threads a needle and begins to sew buttons on a lady's coat. Mrs. Rooney comes back carrying a small square package wrapped in newspaper.*]

MRS. ROONEY. Here's something. You'll like this, Mrs. Lezinsky. It belongs to Eileen.

MRS. LEZINSKY [*looking out at the child in the carriage*]. Was her collar stitched all right, Mrs. Rooney?

MRS. ROONEY. It was that. Fits her coat perfect. See the new cap on her? 'Twas for her birthday I bought it. Three years old now. Getting that big I can feel the weight of her.

MRS. LEZINSKY. Such a beautiful little girl, Mrs. Rooney! And such stylish clothes you buy for her. My David should have a new suit from his papa's right away now. Then we fix the old one over for Julius. Maybe my Benny gets a little good out of that suit too, sometime. We couldn't afford to buy new clothes. We should first get all the wear out of the old ones. Yes, Mrs. Rooney. Anyhow, boys! It don't so much matter. But girls! Girls is different. And such a beautiful little girl like Eileen!

MRS. ROONEY. She'll be spoilt on me entirely — every one giving her her own way. [*In a gush of mother-pride.*] 'Tis the darling she is — anyhow.

MRS. LEZINSKY. O, Mrs. Rooney, I could wish to have one just like her, I tell you, such a beautiful little girl just like her.

MRS. ROONEY. Maybe you will, Mrs. Lezinsky, maybe you will.

MRS. LEZINSKY. She sleeps nice in that baby-carriage.

MRS. ROONEY. 'Tis the last time she sleeps in it.

MRS. LEZINSKY. The last time, what?

MRS. ROONEY. Her pa'll be after buying me a go-cart for her now we're moving. 'Tis destroying me — the hauling that up and down stairs.

MRS. LEZINSKY. Such a gorgeous baby-carriage — all fresh painted — white —

MRS. ROONEY. It's fine for them that likes it. As for me — I'm that tired of dragging it, I'd rather be leaving it behind.

MRS. LEZINSKY [*her face aglow*]. What happens to that carriage, Mrs. Rooney?

MRS. ROONEY. I'll be selling it.

MRS. LEZINSKY. Who buys that carriage, Mrs. Rooney?

MRS. ROONEY. More than one has their eye on it, but I'll get my price. *Mrs. Cohen has spoke for it.*

MRS. LEZINSKY. How much you ask for that carriage, Mrs. Rooney?

MRS. ROONEY. Sure, and I'd let it go for a $5 bill, Mrs. Lezinsky.

Mrs. Lezinsky [*her face falls*]. Maybe you get that $5 . . . Mrs. Rooney. Those Cohens make money by that stationery business.

Mrs. Rooney. And sure, the second-hand man would pay me as much.

Mrs. Lezinsky [*longingly*]. My David and Julius and Benny — they never had such a baby-carriage — in all their lives they never rode in a baby-carriage. My babies was pretty babies, too. And smart, Mrs. Rooney! You wouldn't believe it. My Benny was the smartest of the lot. When he was 18 months old, he puts two words together already.

Mrs. Rooney. He's a keener — that one. [*Unwraps the package.*] I'm clean forgetting the basket. [*Holds it out to Mrs. Lezinsky's delighted gaze.*] Now there you are — as good as new — Mrs. Lezinsky — and when you do be sticking the safety pins into the cushion [*she points out the cushion*] you can mind my Eileen. Some of the pinholes is rusty like, but the pins'll cover it — that it was herself gave your baby its first present.

Mrs. Lezinsky. O, Mrs. Rooney, such a beautiful basket! Such a beautiful, stylish basket!

Mrs. Rooney. And here's a box for the powder. [*Opens a celluloid box and takes out a powder puff.*] And here's an old puff. Sure the puff will do if you're not too particular.

Mrs. Lezinsky [*handling the things*]. Why should I be so particular? In all their lives my David and Julius and Benny never had such a box and puff, I tell you, Mrs. Rooney.

Mrs. Rooney [*points*]. Them little pockets is to stick things in.

Mrs. Lezinsky. Should you give away such a basket, Mrs. Rooney?

Mrs. Rooney. What good is it but to clutter up the closet, knocking about in my way.

Mrs. Lezinsky. My David and Julius and Benny, they never had such a basket, but my cousin, Morris Schapiro's wife,— she had such a basket — for her baby. All lined with pink it was.

Mrs. Rooney. Pink is for boys. I wanted a girl, having Mickey then.

Mrs. Lezinsky. Me, too, Mrs. Rooney. Three boys! Now it's time it should be a little girl. Yes, Mrs. Rooney. A little girl like Eileen.

Mrs. Rooney. Sure, then, if you're going by the basket 'tis a little girl you have coming to you. Blue's for girls. . . . A comb and a brush for it — you can buy.

Mrs. Lezinsky. Combs and brushes! What should I do with combs and brushes? My David and Julius and Benny are all born bald.

Mrs. Rooney. Sure, Eileen had the finest head of curls was ever seen on a baby — little soft yellow curls — like the down on a bird.

Mrs. Lezinsky. If I should have a little girl — like your Eileen — my David and Julius and Benny — they die for joy over their little sister, I tell you, Mrs. Rooney. Yes, it should be a girl and I name her Eileen. Such pretty names for girls: Eileen and Hazel and Gladys and Goldie. Goldie's a pretty name, too. I like that name so much I call myself Goldie when I go to school. Gietel's my Jewish name. Ugly? Yes, Mrs. Rooney? Goldie's better — much better. But Eileen's the best of all. Eileen's a gorgeous name. I name her Eileen, I do assure you. She should have another name, too, for Solly. Zipporah, maybe — for her dead grandmother.

Mrs. Rooney. Sure, Eileen has a second name: Bridget. 'Tis for my mother in the old country. A saint's name. Her father chose it for her. Bridget's a grand name— that — too.

Mrs. Lezinsky. Zipporah — that was Solly's mother. . . . But I *call* her Eileen.

Mrs. Rooney. That's a grand compliment, Mrs. Lezinsky, and 'tis myself would stand godmother for her should you be wanting me to.

Mrs. Lezinsky. I'm sorry, Mrs. Rooney, by our religion we don't have such god-mothers.

Mrs. Rooney. I'll be running on now not to keep you from your work and so much of it with your poor man and the drops in his sick eyes. Here! [*She puts half a dollar into Mrs. Lezinsky's hand.*]

Mrs. Lezinsky. For what?

Mrs. Rooney. For Mr. Lezinsky stitching the collar on Eileen's coat.

Mrs. Lezinsky [*trying to make Mrs. Rooney take it back*]. Mrs. Rooney —

if you wouldn't insult me — please — when you bring all these lovely things. . . . [*Mrs. Rooney pushes the money away.*] And so you sell that fine baby-carriage. . . . That carriage holds my Benny, too, maybe?

MRS. ROONEY. Sure. Easy.

MRS. LEZINSKY. My David and Julius — they could wheel that carriage. The little sister sleeps in it. And my Benny — he rides at the foot. $5 is cheap for that elegant carriage when you should happen to have so much money. I ask my Solly. Do me the favor, Mrs. Rooney — you should speak to me first before you give it to Mrs. Cohen — yes?

MRS. ROONEY. Sure I will. I'll be leaving the carriage outside and carry the child up. You and Mr. Lezinsky can be making up your minds. [*Mrs. Rooney looks through the window at a man turning in from the street.*] Is it himself coming home?

MRS. LEZINSKY. Any time now, Mrs. Rooney, he comes from the doctor.

MRS. ROONEY. 'Tis not himself. 'Tis some customer.

MRS. LEZINSKY [*as the door opens*]. It's Mr. Rosenbloom.

MRS. ROONEY. See you later. [*Rushes out. Through the window Mrs. Lezinsky watches her take the child out of the carriage.*]

MRS. LEZINSKY [*sighs, turns to her customer*]. O, Mr. Rosenbloom! Glad to see you, Mr. Rosenbloom. You well now, Mr. Rosenbloom?

MR. ROSENBLOOM. Able to get around once more, Mrs. Lezinsky.

MRS. LEZINSKY. I hope you keep that way. You got thinner with your sickness. You lose your face, Mr. Rosenbloom. [*He hands her a coat and a pair of trousers.*] Why should you bother to bring them in? I could send my David or Julius for them.

MR. ROSENBLOOM. Right on my way to the barber-shop. The coat's a little loose now. [*Slips off his coat and puts on the other.*] Across the back. See?

MRS. LEZINSKY. He should take it in a little on the shoulders, Mr. Rosenbloom?

MR. ROSENBLOOM [*considers*]. It wouldn't pay — so much alterations for this particular suit.

MRS. LEZINSKY. It's a good suit, Mr. Rosenbloom.

MR. ROSENBLOOM. He should just shorten the sleeves. Those sleeves were from the first a little too long.

[*He slips the coat off. Mrs. Lezinsky measures coat sleeve against his bent arm.*]

MRS. LEZINSKY. About how much, Mr. Rosenbloom? Say — an inch?

MR. ROSENBLOOM. An inch or an inch and a half — maybe.

MRS. LEZINSKY [*measures again*]. I think that makes them too short, Mr. Rosenbloom. One inch is plenty.

MR. ROSENBLOOM. All right — one inch, then.

MRS. LEZINSKY. One inch. . . . All right, Mr. Rosenbloom — one inch.

MR. ROSENBLOOM. How soon will they be ready?

MRS. LEZINSKY. Maybe to-morrow. He lets all this other work go — maybe — and sets to work on them right away when he gets back home.

MR. ROSENBLOOM. All right.

MRS. LEZINSKY. I send my David or Julius with them, Mr. Rosenbloom?

MR. ROSENBLOOM. I'll stop in the evening and try the coat on.

MRS. LEZINSKY. Maybe it wouldn't be ready to try on so soon — All right, Mr. Rosenbloom, this evening you come in. [*She calls after him as he goes out.*] O, Mr. Rosenbloom! The pants? What should he do to the pants?

MR. ROSENBLOOM [*from the doorway*]. Press them. [*He turns back.*] Press the — whole thing — suit.

MRS. LEZINSKY. Press them. Sure. Press the suit. A fine suit. Certainly a fine piece of goods, Mr. Rosenbloom. Did my husband make it up for you?

MR. ROSENBLOOM. Yes.

MRS. LEZINSKY. I thought so. Wears like iron, too, this goods. Yes, Mr. Rosenbloom? With one eye my husband picks the best pieces of goods I tell you, Mr. Rosenbloom. . . . He should shorten the sleeves one inch. . . . All right, he fixes it to your satisfaction, Mr. Rosenbloom —

MR. ROSENBLOOM. Yes, yes. [*Impatiently edges toward the door.*]

MRS. LEZINSKY. This evening you come for them?

[*He nods and hurries out.*]

Mrs. Lezinsky. Five dollars! [*Drops everything and stands looking dreamily through the shop window at the baby-carriage. She takes a roll of money from her bosom and counts it. Shakes her head dispiritedly and sighs. She makes an estimate of the money coming in from the work on hand. Pointing to Mr. Rosenbloom's suit.*] Two dollars for that — [*Turns from the suit to a pair of torn trousers.*] Half a dollar, anyhow — [*Points to the lady's coat on which she has been sewing buttons.*] A dollar — maybe — [*Hears some one coming, thrusts the roll of money back into her bosom.*]

Lezinsky [*comes in. Spare. Medium height. Pronounced Semitic type. He wears glasses with very thick lenses.*] Where are the children?

Mrs. Lezinsky. Mrs. Klein takes them to the moving pictures with her Izzy.

Lezinsky. Always to the moving pictures! The children go blind, too, pretty soon.

Mrs. Lezinsky. The doctor didn't make your eyes no better, Solly?

Lezinsky. How should he make them better when he says all the time: "Don't use them." And all the time a man must keep right on working to put bread in the mouths of his children. And soon, now, another one comes — nebbich!

Mrs. Lezinsky. Maybe your eyes get much better now when our little Eileen comes.

Lezinsky. Better a boy, Goldie: that helps more in the business.

Mrs. Lezinsky. It's time our David and Julius and Benny should have a little sister now. They like that. Such another little girl like Mrs. Rooney's Eileen. When it is, maybe, a girl, we call her Eileen — like Mrs. Rooney's Eileen. Such a gorgeous name — that Eileen! Yes, Solly?

Lezinsky. Eileen! A Goy name! She should be Rebecca for your mother or Zipporah for mine.

Mrs. Lezinsky. Sure. Zipporah, too, Solly — Eileen Zipporah! When there should be sometime — another boy, Solly, then you name him what you like. When it a little girl — Eileen. I dress her up stylish. Such beautiful things they have in Gumpertz's window. And — Mrs. Rooney sells her baby-carriage. [*Both look out at the carriage.*] She gives it away.

Lezinsky. She gives you a baby-carriage?

Mrs. Lezinsky. For five dollars she gives me that lovely carriage good as new — all fresh painted white — and the little Eileen Zipporah sleeps at the head and Benny rides at the foot by his little sister. So elegant — Solly!

Lezinsky. I put my eyes out to earn the bread and this woman — she should buy a baby-carriage. Oi! Oi!

Mrs. Lezinsky [*points to carriage*]. Such a baby-carriage what Mrs. Rooney has — it only happens to us once, Solly. Only five one-dollars — all fresh painted white — just like new — and such a cover to keep out the sun. She gets a little new go-cart for Eileen. Otherwise she don't give up such an elegant carriage what cost her more money than we could even see at one time except for rents and gas-bills. Five dollars is cheap for that carriage. Five dollars is nothing for that carriage I tell you, Solly. Nothing at all. She sells it now before she moves to the Bronx this afternoon. Such a bargain we shouldn't lose, Solly — even if we don't pay all the money right away down. Yes, Solly? And Mrs. Rooney — she gives our David and Julius and Benny skates and a picture book — and their little sister this fine basket. [*Shows him the basket.*] Yes, Solly. Shouldn't we make sure to buy this baby-carriage? Only five dollars, Solly, this baby-carriage —

Lezinsky. Baby-carriage! Baby-carriage! If I had so much money for baby-carriages I hire me a cutter here. This way I go blind.

Mrs. Lezinsky. No, but by reading the Torah! And that way you lose good custom, too. [*Wheedling him again.*] Maybe you get good business and hire you a cutter when the little Eileen comes. Five dollars! Does that pay wages to a cutter? Yes, Solly? But it buys once a beautiful baby-carriage, and David and Julius go wild to ride their little sister in it — and Benny at the foot.

Lezinsky [*waving his arms*]. I should have a cutter not to lose my customers

— and this woman — she would have a baby-carriage. I lose my eyes, but she would have a baby-carriage.

MRS. LEZINSKY. But it costs only five dollars. What costs a cutter?

LEZINSKY. At Union wages! I might as well ask for the moon, Goldie. Oi! Oi! Soon we all starve together.

MRS. LEZINSKY. You hire you a cheap hand here, Solly. He does pressing and all the dirty work. He works and you boss him around. That looks good to the customers. Yes, Solly? And I save up that five dollars soon and give it back to you. Yes, Solly? Business goes better now already when people come back from the country and everything picks up a little. I help now and we spare that five dollars. Mr. Rosenbloom brings us a little work. See? [*She points to the coat.*] You should make the sleeves shorter —one inch. Mr. Rosenbloom gets thinner by his sickness. His clothes hang a little loose on him.

LEZINSKY [*looks at the trousers*]. And the pants?

MRS. LEZINSKY. Mr. Rosenbloom didn't lose his stomach by his sickness. He only loses his face.

LEZINSKY. Such a *chutzpah!*

MRS. LEZINSKY. Yes, nothing makes Mr. Rosenbloom to lose his cheek, ain't it, Solly? And plenty roast goose has he to fill up his stomach. By us is no more roast goose nowadays.

LEZINSKY. We make up what we didn't get here maybe in the world to come, Goldie *leben.*

MRS. LEZINSKY. Roast goose in the world to come! Such a business! Angels shouldn't eat, Solly. I take my roast goose now — then I sure get it. . . . How much you charge Mr. Rosenbloom for this [*points to the suit*], Solly?

LEZINSKY. One dollar and a half — maybe.

MRS. LEZINSKY. For such a job my cousin Morris Schapiro gets three dollars and not too dear then. Everything goes 'way up and you stay 'way behind. You should raise your prices. No wonder we shall all starve together. It's not baby-carriages what ruin us. Did our David or Julius or Benny ever have such a baby-carriage? No. But it is that you let the customers steal your work.

LEZINSKY. All right — I charge two dollars.

MRS. LEZINSKY. What good should half a dollar do? Three dollars, Solly.

LEZINSKY. Two dollars. Three dollars swindles him.

MRS. LEZINSKY. All right — then two dollars. Fifty cents is fifty cents anyhow. [*She goes up to him and presses her face against his.*] Solly, leben, shouldn't our David and Julius and Benny have a baby-carriage for their little sister?

LEZINSKY. Baby-carriage — Oi! Peace, Goldie, my head aches.

MRS. LEZINSKY [*picking up the trousers*]. How much for these, Solly?

LEZINSKY. One dollar.

MRS. LEZINSKY [*derisively*]. One dollar you say! And for the lady's coat?

LEZINSKY. A couple of dollars, anyway.

MRS. LEZINSKY. A couple of dollars anyway! And he thinks he does good business when he charges a couple of dollars anyway. And for that, my cousin, Morris Schapiro charges three dollars each. A couple of dollars! Your children will be left without bread. [*He mutters phrases from the Torah.*] You hear me, Solly? [*He goes on with his prayers.*] Prayers are what he answers me. Soon you pray in the streets.

LEZINSKY. Woe is me! Woe is me!

MRS. LEZINSKY. Could he even answer me? Yes, if it was roast goose I was asking for or black satin for a decent *Shabbos* dress. But no! [*Satirically.*] Maybe you even get roast goose from your learning. . . . Yes — on account of your praying we all have to go a begging yet.

LEZINSKY. To-morrow is *Rosch Hoschana,* Gietel.

MRS. LEZINSKY. Does *Rosch Hoschana* mean a roast goose by us? Does it even mean a baby-carriage what costs five dollars?

LEZINSKY. Roast goose and baby-carriage! You have no pious thoughts. . . . Go away. . . . My head swims.

MRS. LEZINSKY. That comes by fasting. Don't you fast enough every day?

LEZINSKY. She comes now to roast goose again.

MRS. LEZINSKY. What should I care

for roast goose? *Rosch Roschana* comes next year again. But the baby-carriage — it never comes again.

LEZINSKY. Baby-carriage! Baby-carriage! When you should fast and pray. . . .

MRS. LEZINSKY. What! Should I fast and give our David and Julius and Benny a shadow — maybe — for a little sister? . . . But — yes — I fast, too . . . that — even — for such a baby carriage. O, Solly — that much we all do — for our little Eileen.

LEZINSKY [*wearily, putting his hands to his eyes*]. All right. How much money have you got there — Gietel?

MRS. LEZINSKY [*sweetly*]. Now call me Goldie, Solly, so I know you ain't mad.

LEZINSKY. Yes, yes.

MRS. LEZINSKY. Goldie — say it — Solly *leben* — Go on — count it — Goldie. [*She takes the money out and they count it together.*]

MR. AND MRS. LEZINSKY [*together*]. One . . . [*Counting out another dollar bill.*] — Two . . . [*Counting out a third dollar bill*] — Three . . . [*Counting out a two-dollar bill*] — Five dollars . . . [*Another two-dollar bill*] — Seven dollars . . . [*A ten-dollar bill*] — Seventeen . . . [*Another ten-dollar bill*] — Twenty-seven . . . [*The last ten-dollar bill*] — Thirty-seven.

LEZINSKY. Thirty-seven dollars in all — the rent and the gas!

MRS. LEZINSKY. And a little over, Solly, to pay on the baby carriage.

LEZINSKY. And to-morrow *Rosch Hoschana.* Shall we starve the children on Rosch Hoschana?

MRS. LEZINSKY. They could go a little hungry once for their little sister, Eileen.

LEZINSKY. Don't be too sure, Goldie, maybe another boy comes.

MRS. LEZINSKY. Well, even *if* — it needs the fresh air, too.

LEZINSKY [*firmly after a moment's thought*]. No, Goldie, it couldn't be done. In the spring we buy a baby-carriage.

MRS. LEZINSKY. You think she waits till spring to sell that baby-carriage? She sells it now before she moves away — now, this afternoon, I tell you.

LEZINSKY. Well, we buy another carriage, then.

MRS. LEZINSKY. You don't find such a bargain again anytime. She gives it away.

LEZINSKY. My eyes get much better soon — now — by the operation.

MRS. LEZINSKY. Operation! Operation! Always operations! And the baby comes. No carriage for our David and Julius to wheel her in — with our Benny at the foot — in the fresh air — and she dies on us in the heat next summer — maybe — and David and Julius and Benny — they lose their little sister.

LEZINSKY. Didn't David and Julius and Benny live without a baby-carriage?

MRS. LEZINSKY. Yes, a mile to the park, maybe, and I carry them to the fresh air. And a baby-carriage for her costs five dollars. What time shall I have for that with all the extra work and my back broken? In such a baby-carriage the little sister sleeps from morning to night — on the sidewalk by the stoop; she gets fat and healthy from that baby-carriage.

LEZINSKY. When I could pay for the operation, maybe — then —

MRS. LEZINSKY [*despairingly*]. Operations again — always operations!

LEZINSKY. Go away, Goldie, I must work.

MRS. LEZINSKY. I advise you not to have that operation now. He steals your money and don't help your eyes. Get another doctor. But baby-carriages like this ain't so plenty.

LEZENSKY. God of Israel, shall I go blind because you would have a baby-carriage for our unborn son?

MRS. LEZINSKY. No, but by reading the Torah — and that way you lose good customers, too — and she shall die in the heat because David and Julius cannot push her in that baby-carriage.

LEZINSKY. Go away, Gietel, I have work to do. Maybe you could rip out the sleeves from Mr. Rosenbloom's coat?

MRS. LEZINSKY. I do anything — anything you like, Solly, for that baby-carriage. . . . Yes, I rip out the sleeves when I finish sewing on the buttons. . . . I do anything — anything — so we get this baby carriage. We never get another such carriage.

LEZINSKY. God of Israel, will she never hear me when I say: No!

MRS. LEZINSKY. Then — Mrs. Cohen — she gets that baby carriage — and every day of my life I see it go past my window — and the little sister — she goes without. [*She picks up Mr. Rosenbloom's coat, looks it over and finds a small wallet in the breast pocket. Tucks the wallet into her bosom. Fiercely, half-aloud, but to herself.*] No! No! Mrs. Cohen shouldn't get that baby-carriage — whatever happens — she shouldn't get it. [*She crosses to the mirror, pulls the wallet from her bosom, hurriedly counts the money in it, glances at her husband, then takes out a five-dollar bill. She hears a noise outside and makes a move as though to restore the money to the wallet, but at the sound of steps on the stoop, she thrusts the loose bill into her bosom. As Mr. Rosenbloom comes in she has only time to stick the wallet back into the coat. Picks up the lady's coat and sews on buttons vigorously.*]

MR. ROSENBLOOM. I left my wallet in that coat.

LEZINSKY [*with a motion of his head toward the coat*]. Goldie.

MRS. LEZINSKY [*sewing the buttons onto the lady's coat*]. In which pocket, Mr. Rosenbloom?

MR. ROSENBLOOM [*crosses to coat*]. You don't begin work on it, yet?

MRS. LEZINSKY [*slowly puts her work aside*]. I rip the sleeves out so soon I sew these buttons on, Mr. Rosenbloom.

MR. ROSENBLOOM [*looks in breast pocket, draws back in astonishment to find the wallet gone.*]

MRS. LEZINSKY. In which pocket, Mr. Rosenbloom?

MR. ROSENBLOOM. I keep it always in that breast pocket.

MRS. LEZINSKY [*taking the wallet from an outside pocket*]. Why — here it is, Mr. Rosenbloom.

MR. ROSENBLOOM [*suspiciously*]. From which pocket does it come?

MRS. LEZINSKY [*points*]. Right here, Mr. Rosenbloom.

MR. ROSENBLOOM [*shakes his head*]. I don't see how it got in that pocket.

MRS. LEZINSKY. We didn't touch that coat, Mr. Rosenbloom — except Solly looks when I told him what he should do to it — ain't it, Solly? Otherwise we didn't touch it.

MR. ROSENBLOOM [*opens the wallet*]. Funny! It couldn't walk out of one pocket into another all by itself.

MRS. LEZINSKY. We didn't touch it, Mr. Rosenbloom.

MR. ROSENBLOOM [*begins to count the bills*]. Maybe some customer —

MRS. LEZINSKY. That may be — all kinds of customers, Mr. Rosenbloom —

LEZINSKY [*as Mr. Rosenbloom goes over the money for the second time.*] But it hangs here always in our sight. Who has been here, Goldie?

MR. ROSENBLOOM. There's a bill missing here.

MRS. LEZINSKY [*pretending great astonishment*]. Mr. Rosenbloom!

LEZINSKY [*with an accusing note in his tone, meant for her only*]. Gietel?

MRS. LEZINSKY. How should I know? [*To Mr. Rosenbloom.*] Maybe you didn't count it right. [*He counts it again.*]

MR. ROSENBLOOM. No—it's short—$5.

LEZINSKY [*under his breath, looking strangely at his wife.*] Mr. Rosenbloom, however that happens — I make up that $5. Such a thing shouldn't happen in my business. I make it up right away. Gietel! — Gietel — give me the money.

MRS. LEZINSKY [*in a trembling voice*]. I didn't —

LEZINSKY [*checks her*]. I pay you from my own money, Mr. Rosenbloom. . . . Gietel! [*He puts out his hand for the money.*]

MRS. LEZINSKY. All right, Solly. . . . [*Turns her back to Mr. Rosenbloom and pulls the roll of money from her bosom, thrusting the loose bill back. Solomon, standing over her, sees this bill and puts out his hand for it.*]

LEZINSKY [*in a tense undertone*]. All — Gietel — all!

[*Reluctantly she draws the $5 bill from her bosom and, seizing a moment when Mr. Rosenbloom is recounting his money, she thrusts it quickly into her husband's hand.*]

LEZINSKY [*he crosses to Mr. Rosenbloom and counts out the five dollars from the bills in the roll.*] One dollar — two dollars — three dollars — and two is five dollars. [*Hands it to Mr. Rosenbloom.*]

MR. ROSENBLOOM [*hesitates*]. You shouldn't be out that $5, Mr. Lezinsky. Anyhow — pay me the difference when you charge for the suit.

LEZINSKY. No, Mr. Rosenbloom — if you take the money now, please. . . . I couldn't rest — otherwise. In all my life — this — never — happened — before.

MR. ROSENBLOOM [*takes the money*]. Well, if you want it that way, Mr. Lezinsky. . . . You have the suit ready this evening anyhow?

LEZINSKY. You get the suit this evening, Mr. Rosenbloom. I stop everything else. . . . And I don't charge you anything for this work, Mr. Rosenbloom.

MR. ROSENBLOOM. Of course, you charge. "Don't charge"! What kind of business is that?

LEZINSKY. I make you a present, Mr. Rosenbloom — for your trouble.

MR. ROSENBLOOM. I pay you for these alterations, all right. [*He goes out.*]

LEZINSKY [*searches his wife's face, with ominous calm*]. Gietel! Gietel!

MRS. LEZINSKY. You make presents, eh, Solly? Are you a rabbi or a poor blind tailor — yes?

LEZINSKY [*bursts out*]. She makes a mock at me — this shameless one!

MRS. LEZINSKY. No, no, Solly —

LEZINSKY [*scathingly*]. Gietel! . . . [*His eyes never leave her face.*]

MRS. LEZINSKY [*in a hushed voice*]. Why do you look at me like that, Solly?

LEZINSKY. Blind as I am, I see too much, Gietel.

MRS. LEZINSKY. Listen, Solly — I tell you now —

LEZINSKY [*silences her with a wave of his hand.*] What I get I give — [*He takes the five-dollar bill from his pocket, smooths it out and adds it to the roll.*] I give my money. I give my eyes . . . and this woman — she sells me for a baby-carriage.

MRS. LEZINSKY. No, no, Solly, you shouldn't say such things before you know —

LEZINSKY. Silence, woman! How should I *not* know? It is here in my hand — the five-dollar bill — here in my hand. I have counted the money. Thirty-seven dollars we had. I have given him back his five and thirty-seven dollars remain. How is that, Gietel? What is the answer to that? . . . She cheats the customer and she cheats me. . . . Rather should I take my children by the hand and beg my bread from door to door.

MRS. LEZINSKY. Solly — Solly — I tell you — the baby-carriage —

LEZINSKY. Out of my sight, woman; I forbid you to come into this shop again.

MRS. LEZINSKY. O, Solly *leben,* that couldn't be —

LEZINSKY. The mother of my children — she sins — for a baby-carriage.

MRS. LEZINSKY. Listen, Solly — I didn't mean to keep that money. As there's a God of Israel I didn't mean to keep it. I should use it — just this afternoon — to buy the baby-carriage — and when the customers pay us — put the money back before he misses it.

LEZINSKY. Meshugge! So much money isn't coming to us. And why should you use Mr. Rosenbloom's money? Why shouldn't you take it from the money you had?

MRS. LEZINSKY. How could I use that money? Don't you pay the rent this afternoon to the agent? And they shut off the gas when we don't settle: by five o'clock they shut it off. And Mrs. Rooney moves away — [*Breaks into sobbing.*] and so — I thought I lose the baby-carriage.

LEZINSKY. Gietel — Gietel — you are a ——. I can't speak the word, Gietel — It sticks in my throat.

MRS. LEZINSKY. No, no, Solly, you shouldn't speak that word. If I took it to keep it maybe. But — no. I couldn't do such a thing. Not for a million baby-carriages could I do such a thing. Not for anything could I keep what is not my own — I tell you, Solly. . . . [*Pleadingly.*] But just to keep it for a few hours, maybe? Why should a man with so much money miss a little for a few hours? Then Mr. Rosenbloom — he comes back in. I change my mind, but the door opens and it is too late already. Solly leben, did I keep it back — the five dollars? I ask you, Solly? Didn't I give it all into your hand? I ask you that, Solly?

LEZINSKY. Woe is me! — The mother of my children — and she takes what is not her own!

MRS. LEZINSKY. So much money and

not one dollar to pay Mrs. Rooney for the baby-carriage! You see, Solly — always fine-dressed people around — the mamas and the little children all dressed fine — with white socks and white shoes. And our David — and our Julius — and our Benny, even — what *must* they wear? Old clothes! Yes. And to save the money they should wear black stockings — and old shoes. Never no pretty things! And it's all the time work — work — work and we never have nothing — no new clothes — no pretty things — [*She breaks down completely.*]

LEZINSKY. So our children grow up with the fear of God in their hearts —

MRS. LEZINSKY. What should little children know of all this pious business when they must play alone on the stoop with Izzi Klein together. For why? The Cohen children shouldn't play with our David and Julius and Benny. They make a snout at them. The Cohens dress them up stylish and they should play with Gentile children. They push my Benny in the stomach when he eats an ice-cream cone, and they say — regular — to my David and Julius: "Sheeny" — the same as if they wasn't Jewish, too. . . . Just for once I wanted something lovely and stylish — like other people have. . . . Then she asks — only five dollars for the baby-carriage — and — [*Choking back a sob.*] Mrs. Cohen — now, Mrs. Cohen — she gets it. She gets it and I must want — and want. First David — then Julius — then comes Benny — and now the little sister — and never once a baby-carriage! [*Sobs.*]

LEZINSKY. We should raise our children to be pious.

[*There is the sound of trundling wheels. Mrs. Lezinsky looks out. The carriage is gone from the window.*]

MRS. LEZINSKY [*as the door opens and Mrs. Rooney appears wheeling the carriage in, low voices*]. Mrs. Rooney, Solly; she comes now to say good-by. [*Mops her eyes, trys to put on a casual look.*]

MRS. ROONEY. Now there you are, Mrs. Lezinsky, blanket and all.

[*Lezinsky works feverishly without lifting his eyes.*]

MRS. LEZINSKY [*low appealing voice*]. You should look at it once, Solly. [*Lezinsky stops for a moment and lets his eyes rest on the baby-carriage.*] Ain't it a beautiful, stylish baby-carriage, Solly?

MRS. ROONEY. There it is now and I'll be running on for Mrs. Klein's Anna's keeping Eileen and I have her to dress before her pa comes home. He's getting off earlier for the moving.

MRS. LEZINSKY. The little Eileen! Why didn't you bring her along with you, Mrs. Rooney?

MRS. ROONEY. She went to sleep on me or I would that.

MRS. LEZINSKY [*her eyes on her husband's face in mute appeal.*] O, Mrs. Rooney — so little business and so much expense — and my Solly has an operation for his sick eyes soon — it breaks my heart — but — Mrs. Cohen [*Shaking voice.*] *she* gets this lovely baby carriage.

MRS. ROONEY [*taking in the situation*]. Mrs. Cohen — *she* gets it! Does she now? Not if my name's Rooney does Mrs. Cohen get it and she only after offering to raise me a dollar to make sure of the baby-carriage, knowing your sore need of the same. Am I a lady or not, Mr. Lezinsky? 'Tis that I want to know. "I'll give you six dollars for it," says she to me. Says I to her: "Mrs. Cohen — when I spoke to you of that baby-carriage," says I, "it clean slipped me mind that I promised the same to Mrs. Lezinsky. I promised it to Mrs. Lezinsky long ago," says I — and so I did, though I forget to make mention of it to you at the time, Mrs. Lezinsky. So here it is and here it stays or my name's not Rooney.

MRS. LEZINSKY. But so much money we haven't got now — not even for the operation, Mrs. Rooney. . . . [*Soft pleading undertone to her husband.*] Only five dollars, Solly! . . . [*Sinking her voice still lower.*] Anyhow — I don't deserve no baby-carriage — maybe — [*Lezinsky makes no sign.*]

MRS. LEZINSKY. If we could possibly pay for that baby-carriage we keep it, Mrs. Rooney — [*Turns back to her husband, voice shakes.*] for our Benny and the little sister — yes, Solly? [*She waits and watches him with mute appeal, then, forcing herself to speak casually.*] But

it couldn't be done, Mrs. Rooney — [*Bravely.*] Solly should have every dollar for that operation.

MRS. ROONEY. There now — no more about it! 'Tis your own from this day out. . . . You can take your own time to be paying for it. . . . I'll be wanting some work done anyhow — when the cold weather sets in.

MRS. LEZINSKY [*between tears and laughter*]. Solly! . . . Ain't it wonderful? Mrs. Rooney — she trusts us — for this beautiful baby-carriage! . . . O, Mrs. Rooney!

MRS. ROONEY. 'Tis little enough to be doing for my godchild that could be was she born a Catholic now.

MRS. LEZINSKY. O, Mrs. Rooney, dear Mrs. Rooney! Solly, Solly, we should have a baby-carriage at last! At last we should have a baby-carriage. O, Solly, Solly, what a *mitzvah!* Yes, Solly? [*As Mrs. Rooney starts to leave.*] But your blanket — Mrs. Rooney —

MRS. ROONEY. I'll be throwing that in — for good luck.

MRS. LEZINSKY. It breaks my heart you move away, Mrs. Rooney.

MRS. ROONEY. See you soon. [*Opens the door; looks up the street as she stands in the doorway.*] Here's the kids coming.

MRS. LEZINSKY. My David and Julius and Benny, they could die for joy to wheel their little sister in this baby-carriage.

MRS. ROONEY. Well, good luck — the both of you — and good-by! [*With a sense of pride in the greater prosperity which the new address means to her.*] Three thousand and thirty-seven Jerome Avenue — don't forget!

MRS. LEZINSKY [*bending over the baby-carriage*]. Good-by, Mrs. Rooney — next time you come, maybe you see her in the baby-carriage. [*Soothing the blanket*] — the little Eileen! [*Turns to her husband as the door closes.*] Yes, Solly?

[*They look at each other in silence for a moment.—She puts out her hands imploringly. His face softens; he lays his hand on her shoulder as the three little boys, David, Julius and Benny pass by the window. As they come into the shop the Curtain Falls.*]

THE PIERROT OF THE MINUTE

A Dramatic Fantasy

By Ernest Dowson

CHARACTERS

A Moon Maiden.
Pierrot.

THE PIERROT OF THE MINUTE

A Dramatic Fantasy

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[Scene: *A glade in the Parc du Petit Trianon. In the center a Doric temple with steps coming down the stage. On the left a little Cupid on a pedestal. Twilight.*

Enter Pierrot with his hands full of lilies. He is burdened with a little basket. He stands gazing at the Temple and the Statue.]

Pierrot.

My journey's end! This surely is the glade
Which I was promised: I have well obeyed!
A clue of lilies was I bid to find,
Where the green alleys most obscurely wind;
Where tall oaks darkliest canopy o'erhead,
And moss and violet make the softest bed;
Where the path ends, and leagues behind me lie
The gleaming courts and gardens of Versailles;
The lilies streamed before me, green and white;
I gathered, following: they led me right,
To the bright temple and the sacred grove:
This is, in truth, the very shrine of Love!
[*He gathers together his flowers and lays them at the foot of Cupid's statue; then he goes timidly up the first steps of the temple and stops.*]
It is so solitary, I grow afraid.
Is there no priest here, no devoted maid?
Is there no oracle, no voice to speak,
Interpreting to me the word I seek?
[*A very gentle music of lutes floats out from the temple. Pierrot starts back; he shows extreme surprise; then he returns to the foreground, and crouches down in rapt attention until the music ceases. His face grows puzzled and petulant.*]
Too soon! too soon! in that enchanting strain
Days yet unlived, I almost lived again:
It almost taught me that I most would know —
Why am I here, and why am I Pierrot?
[*Absently he picks up a lily which has fallen to the ground, and repeats.*]
Why came I here, and why am I Pierrot?
That music and this silence both affright;
Pierrot can never be a friend of night.
I never felt my solitude before —
Once safe at home, I will return no more.
Yet the commandment of the scroll was plain;
While the light lingers let me read again.
[*He takes a scroll from his bosom and reads.*]
"He loves to-night who never loved before;
Who ever loved, to-night shall love once more."
I never loved! I know not what love is.
I am so ignorant — but what is this?
[*Reads.*]
"Who would adventure to encounter Love
Must rest one night within this hallowed grove.
Cast down thy lilies, which have led thee on,
Before the tender feet of Cupidon."
Thus much is done, the night remains to me.

Well, Cupidon, be my security!
Here is more writing, but too faint to read.
[*He puzzles for a moment, then casts the scroll down.*]
Hence, vain old parchment. I have learnt thy rede!
[*He looks round uneasily, starts at his shadow; then discovers his basket with glee. He takes out a flask of wine, pours it into a glass, and drinks.*]
Courage, *mon Ami!* I shall never miss
Society with such a friend as this.
How merrily the rosy bubbles pass,
Across the amber crystal of the glass.
I had forgotten you. Methinks this quest
Can wake no sweeter echo in my breast.
[*Looks round at the statue, and starts.*]
Nay, little god! forgive. I did but jest.
[*He fills another glass, and pours it upon the statue.*]
This libation, Cupid, take,
With the lilies at thy feet;
Cherish Pierrot for their sake,
Send him visions strange and sweet,
While he slumbers at thy feet.
Only love kiss him awake!
Only love kiss him awake!
[*Slowly falls the darkness, soft music plays, while Pierrot gathers together fern and foliage into a rough couch at the foot of the steps which lead to the Temple d'Amour. Then he lies down upon it, having made his prayer. It is night. He speaks softly.*]
Music, more music, far away and faint:
It is an echo of mine heart's complaint.
Why should I be so musical and sad?
I wonder why I used to be so glad?
In single glee I chased blue butterflies,
Half butterfly myself, but not so wise,
For they were twain, and I was only one.
Ah me! how pitiful to be alone.
My brown birds told me much, but in mine ear
They never whispered this — I learned it here:
The soft wood sounds, the rustling in the breeze,
Are but the stealthy kisses of the trees.
Each flower and fern in this enchanted wood
Leans to her fellow, and is understood;
The eglantine, in loftier station set,
Stoops down to woo the maidly violet.
In gracile pairs the very lilies grow:
None is companionless except Pierrot.
Music, more music! how its echoes steal
Upon my senses with unlooked for weal.
Tired am I, tired, and far from this lone glade
Seems mine old joy in rout and masquerade.
Sleep cometh over me, now will I prove,
By Cupid's grace, what is this thing called love.
[*Sleeps.*]
[*There is more music of lutes for an interval, during which a bright radiance, white and cold, streams from the temple upon the face of Pierrot. Presently a Moon Maiden steps out of the temple; she descends and stands over the sleeper.*]

THE LADY.
Who is this mortal
Who ventures to-night
To woo an immortal?
Cold, cold the moon's light,
For sleep at this portal,
Bold lover of night.
Fair is the mortal
In soft, silken white,
Who seeks an immortal.
Ah, lover of night,
Be warned at the portal,
And save thee in flight!
[*She stoops over him; Pierrot stirs in his sleep.*]

PIERROT [*murmuring*].
Forget not, Cupid. Teach me all thy lore:
"He loves to-night who never loved before."

THE LADY.
Unwitting boy! when, be it soon or late,
What Pierrot ever has escaped his fate?
What if I warned him! He might yet evade,
Through the long windings of this verdant glade;
Seek his companions in the blither way,
Which, else, must be as lost as yesterday.
So might he still pass some unheeding hours
In the sweet company of birds and flowers.

How fair he is, with red lips formed for joy,
As softly curved as those of Venus' boy.
Methinks his eyes, beneath their silver sheaves,
Rest tranquilly like lilies under leaves.
Arrayed in innocence, what touch of grace
Reveals the scion of a courtly race?
Well, I will warn him, though, I fear, too late —
What Pierrot ever has escaped his fate?
But, see, he stirs, new knowledge fires his brain,
And cupid's vision bids him wake again.
Dione's Daughter! but how fair he is,
Would it be wrong to rouse him with a kiss?
[*She stoops down and kisses him, then withdraws into the shadow.*]

PIERROT [*rubbing his eyes*].
Celestial messenger! remain, remain;
Or, if a vision, visit me again!
What is this light, and whither am I come
To sleep beneath the stars so far from home?
[*Rises slowly to his feet.*]
Stay, I remember this is Venus' Grove,
And I am hither come to encounter —

THE LADY [*coming forward, but veiled*].
Love!

PIERROT [*in ecstasy, throwing himself at her feet*].
Then have I ventured and encountered Love?

THE LADY.
Not yet, rash boy! and, if thou wouldst be wise,
Return unknowing; he is safe who flies.

PIERROT.
Never, sweet lady, will I leave this place
Until I see the wonder of thy face.
Goddess or Naiad! lady of this Grove,
Made mortal for a night to teach me love,
Unveil thyself, although thy beauty be
Too luminous for my mortality.

THE LADY [*unveiling*].
Then, foolish boy, receive at length thy will:
Now knowest thou the greatness of thine ill.

PIERROT.
Now have I lost my heart, and gained my goal.

THE LADY.
Didst thou not read the warning on the scroll?
[*Picks up the parchment.*]

PIERROT.
I read it all, as on this quest I fared,
Save where it was illegible and hard.

THE LADY.
Alack! poor scholar, wast thou never taught
A little knowledge serveth less than naught?
Hadst thou perused — but, stay, I will explain
What was the writing which thou didst disdain.
[*Reads.*]
"*Au Petit Trianon,* at night's full noon,
Mortal, beware the kisses of the moon!
Whoso seeks her she gathers like a flower —
He gives a life, and only gains an hour."

PIERROT [*laughing recklessly*].
Bear me away to thine enchanted bower,
All of my life I venture for an hour.

THE LADY.
Take up thy destiny of short delight;
I am thy lady for a summer's night,
Lift up your viols, maidens of my train,
And work such havoc on this mortal's brain
That for a moment he may touch and know
Immortal things, and be full Pierrot,
White music, Nymphs! Violet and Eglantine!
To stir his tired veins like magic wine,
What visitants across his spirit glance,
Lying on lilies, while he watch me dance?
Watch, and forget all weary things on earth,
All memories and cares, all joy and mirth,
While my dance woos him, light and rhythmical,
And weaves his heart into my coronal.
Music, more music for his soul's delight:
Love is his lady for a summer's night.
[*Pierrot reclines, and gazes at her while she dances. The dance finished, she beckons to him: he rises dreamily, and stands at her side.*]

PIERROT.
Whence came, dear Queen, such magic melody?
THE LADY.
Pan made it long ago in Arcady.
PIERROT.
I heard it long ago, I know not where,
As I knew thee, or ever I came here.
But I forgot all things — my name and race,
All that I ever knew except thy face.
Who art thou, lady? Breathe a name to me,
That I may tell it like a rosary.
Thou, whom I sought, dear Dryad of the trees,
How art thou designate — art thou Heart's-Ease?
THE LADY.
Waste not the night in idle questioning,
Since Love departs at dawn's awakening.
PIERROT.
Nay, thou art right; what recks thy name or state,
Since thou art lovely and passionate.
Play out thy will on me: I am thy lyre.
THE LADY.
I am to each the face of his desire.
PIERROT.
I am not Pierrot, but Venus' dove,
Who craves a refuge on the breast of love.
THE LADY.
What wouldst thou of the maiden of the moon?
Until the cock crow I may grant thy boon.
PIERROT.
Then, sweet Moon Maiden, in some magic car,
Wrought wondrously of many a homeless star —
Such must attend thy journeys through the skies,—
Drawn by a team of milk-white butterflies,
Whom, with soft voice and music of thy maids,
Thou urgest gently through the heavenly glades;
Mount me beside thee, bear me far away
From the low regions of the solar day;
Over the rainbow, up into the moon,
Where is thy palace and thine opal throne;
There on thy bosom —
THE LADY.
Too ambitious boy!
I did but promise thee one hour of joy.
This tour thou plannest, with a heart so light,
Could hardly be completed in a night.
Hast thou no craving less remote than this?
PIERROT.
Would it be impudent to beg a kiss?
THE LADY.
I say not that: yet prithee have a care!
Often audacity has proved a snare.
How wan and pale do moon-kissed roses grow —
Does thou not fear my kisses, Pierrot?
PIERROT.
As one who faints upon the Libyan plain
Fears the oasis which brings life again!
THE LADY.
Where far away green palm trees seem to stand
May be a mirage of the wreathing sand.
PIERROT.
Nay, dear enchantress, I consider naught,
Save mine own ignorance, which would be taught.
THE LADY.
Dost thou persist?
PIERROT.
I do entreat this boon!
[*She bends forward, their lips meet: she withdraws with a petulant shiver. She utters a peal of clear laughter.*]
THE LADY.
Why art thou pale, fond lover of the moon?
PIERROT.
Cold are thy lips, more cold than I can tell;
Yet would I hang on them, thine icicle!
Cold is thy kiss, more cold than I could dream
Arctus sits, watching the Boreal stream:
But with its frost such sweetness did conspire
That all my veins are filled with running fire;

Never I knew that life contained such bliss
As the divine completeness of a kiss.

THE LADY.

Apt scholar! so love's lesson has been taught,
Warning, as usual, has gone for naught.

PIERROT.

Had all my schooling been of this soft kind,
To play the truant I were less inclined.
Teach me again! I am a sorry dunce —
I never knew a task by conning once.

THE LADY.

Then come with me! below this pleasant shrine
Of Venus we will presently recline,
Until birds' twitter beckon me away
To my own home, beyond the milky-way.
I will instruct thee, for I deem as yet
Of Love thou knowest but the alphabet.

PIERROT.

In its sweet grammar I shall grow most wise,
If all its rules be written in thine eyes.
[*The Lady sits upon a step of the temple, and Pierrot leans upon his elbow at her feet, regarding her.*]
Sweet contemplation! how my senses yearn to be thy scholar always, always learn.
Hold not so high from me thy radiant mouth,
Fragrant with all the spices of the South;
Nor turn, O sweet! thy golden face away,
For with it goes the light of all my day.
Let me peruse it, till I know by rote
Each line of it, like music, note by note;
Raise thy long lashes, Lady; smile again:
These studies profit me.
[*Takes her hand.*]

THE LADY.

Refrain, refrain!

PERROT [*with passion*].

I am but studious, so do not stir;
Thou art my star, I thine astronomer!
Geometry was founded on thy lip.
[*Kisses her hand.*]

THE LADY.

This attitude becomes not scholarship!
Thy zeal I praise; but, prithee, not so fast,
Nor leave the rudiments until the last,
Science applied is good, but 'twere a schism
To study such before the catechism.
Bear thee more modestly, while I submit
Some easy problems to confirm thy wit.

PIERROT.

In all humility my mind I pit
Against her problems which would test my wit.

THE LADY [*questioning him from a little book bound deliciously in vellum*].

What is Love?
Is it folly,
Is it mirth, or melancholy?
Joys above,
Are there many, or not any?
What is love?

PIERROT [*answering in a very humble attitude of scholarship*].

If you please,
A most sweet folly!
Full of mirth and melancholy:
Both of these!
In its sadness worth all gladness,
If you please!

THE LADY.

Prithee where,
Goes Love a-hiding?
Is he long in his abiding
Anywhere?
Can you bind him when you find him;
Prithee, where?

PIERROT.

With spring days
Love comes and dallies:
Upon the mountains, through the valleys
Lie Love's ways.
Then he leaves you and deceives you
In spring days.

THE LADY.

Thine answers please me: 'tis thy turn to ask.
To meet thy questioning be now my task.

PIERROT.

Since I know thee, dear Immortal,
Is my heart become a blossom,
To be worn upon thy bosom.
When thou turn me from this portal,
Whither shall I, hapless mortal,

Seek love out and win again
Heart of me that thou retain?

THE LADY.

In and out the woods and valleys,
Circling, soaring like a swallow,
Love shall flee and thou shalt follow:
Though he stops awhile and dallies,
Never shalt thou stay his malice!
Moon-kissed mortals seek in vain
To possess their hearts again!

PIERROT.

Tell me, Lady, shall I never
Rid me of this grievous burden!
Follow Love and find his guerdon
In no maiden whatsoever?
Wilt thou hold my heart forever?
Rather would I thine forget,
In some earthly Pierrette!

THE LADY.

Thus thy fate, what'er thy will is!
Moon-struck child, go seek my traces
Vainly in all mortal faces!
In and out among the lilies,
Court each rural Amaryllis:
Seek the signet of Love's hand
In each courtly Corisande!

PIERROT.

Now, verily, sweet maid, of school I tire;
These answers are not such as I desire.

THE LADY.

Why art thou sad?

PIERROT.

I dare not tell.

THE LADY [*caressingly*].

Come, say!

PIERROT.

Is love all schooling, with no time to play?

THE LADY.

Though all love's lessons be a holiday,
Yet I will humor thee: what wouldst thou play?

PIERROT.

What are the games that small moon-maids enjoy:
Or is their time all spent in staid employ?

THE LADY.

Sedate they are, yet games they much enjoy:
They skip with stars, the rainbow is their toy.

PIERROT.

That is too hard!

THE LADY.

For mortal's play.

PIERROT.

What then?

THE LADY.

Teach me some pastime from the world of men.

PIERROT.

I have it, maiden.

THE LADY.

Can it soon be taught?

PIERROT.

A single game, I learnt it at the Court.

THE LADY.

But, prithee, not so near.

PIERROT.

That is essential, as will soon appear.
Lay here thine hand, which cold night dews anoint,
Washing its white —

THE LADY.

Now is this to the point?

PIERROT.

Prithee, forbear! Such is the game's design.

THE LADY.

Here is my hand.

PIERROT.

I cover it with mine.

THE LADY.

What must I next?

[*They play.*]

PIERROT.

Withdraw.

THE LADY.

It goes too fast.

[*They continue playing, until Pierrot catches her hand.*]

PIERROT [*laughing*].

'Tis done. I win my forfeit at the last.

[*He tries to embrace her. She escapes; he chases her round the stage; she eludes him.*]

THE LADY.

Thou art not quick enough. Who hopes to catch
A moon-beam, must use twice as much dispatch.

PIERROT [*sitting down sulkily*].

I grow aweary, and my heart is sore.
Thou dost not love me; I will play no more.

[*He buries his face in his hands. The Lady stands over him.*]

THE LADY.

What is this petulance?

PIERROT.
'Tis quick to tell —
Thou hast but mocked me.
THE LADY.
Nay! I love thee well!
PIERROT.
Repeat those words, for still within my breast
A whisper warns me they are said in jest.
THE LADY.
I jested not: at daybreak I must go,
Yet loving thee far better than thou know.
PIERROT.
Then, by this altar, and this sacred shrine,
Take my sworn troth, and swear thee wholly mine!
The gods have wedded mortals long ere this.
THE LADY.
There was enough betrothal in my kiss.
What need of further oaths?
PIERROT.
That bound not thee!
THE LADY.
Peace! since I tell thee that it may not be.
But sit beside me whilst I soothe thy bale
With some moon fancy or celestial tale.
PIERROT.
Tell me of thee, and that dimy, happy place
Where lies thine home, with maidens of thy race!
THE LADY [*seating herself*].
Calm is it yonder, very calm; the air
For mortals' breath is too refined and rare;
Hard by a green lagoon our palace rears
Its dome of agate through a myriad years.
A hundred chambers its bright walls enthrone,
Each one carved strangely from a precious stone.
Within the fairest, clad in purity,
Our mother dwelleth immemorially:
Moon-calm, moon-pale, with moon stones on her gown,
The floor she treads with little pearls is sown;
She sits upon a throne of amethysts,
And orders mortal fortunes as she lists;
I, and my sisters, all around her stand,
And, when she speaks, accomplish her demand.
PIERROT.
Methought grim Clotho and her sisters twain
With shriveled fingers spun this web of bane!
THE LADY.
Theirs and my mother's realm is far apart;
Hers is the lustrous kingdom of the heart,
And dreamers all, and all who sing and love,
Her power acknowledge, and her rule approve.
PIERROT.
Me, even me, she hath led into this grove.
THE LADY.
Yea, thou art one of hers! But, ere this night,
Often I watched my sisters take their flight
Down heaven's stairway of the clustered stars
To gaze on mortals through their lattice bars;
And some in sleep they woo with dreams of bliss
Too shadowy to tell, and some they kiss.
But all to whom they come, my sisters say,
Forthwith forget all joyance of the day,
Forget their laughter and forget their tears,
And dream away with singing all their years —
Moon-lovers always!
[*She sighs.*]
PIERROT.
Why art sad, sweet Moon?
[*Laughs.*]
THE LADY.
For this, my story, grant me now a boon.
PIERROT.
I am thy servitor.
THE LADY.
Would, then, I knew
More of the earth, what men and women do.

PIERROT.
I will explain.
THE LADY.
Let brevity attend
Thy wit, for night approaches to its end.
PIERROT.
Once was I a page at Court, so trust in me:
That's the first lesson of society.
THE LADY.
Society?
PIERROT.
I mean the very best
Pardy! thou wouldst not hear about the rest.
I know it not, but am a *petit maître*
At rout and festival and *bal champêtre.*
But since example be instruction's ease,
Let's play the thing.— Now, Madame, if you please!
[*He helps her to rise, and leads her forward: then he kisses her hand, bowing over it with a very courtly air.*]
THE LADY.
What am I, then?
PIERROT.
A most divine Marquise!
Perhaps that attitude hath too much ease.
[*Passes her.*]
Ah, that is better! To complete the plan,
Nothing is necessary save a fan.
THE LADY.
Cool is the night, what needs it?
PIERROT.
Madame, pray
Reflect, it is essential to our play.
THE LADY [*taking a lily*].
Here is my fan!
PIERROT.
So, use it with intent:
The deadliest arm in beauty's armament!
THE LADY.
What do we next?
PIERROT.
We talk!
THE LADY.
But what about?
PIERROT.
We quiz the company and praise the rout;
Are polished, petulant, malicious, sly,
Or what you will, so reputations die.
Observe the Duchess in Venetian lace,
With the red eminence.
THE LADY.
A pretty face!
PIERROT.
For something tarter set thy wits to search —
"She loves the churchman better than the church."
THE LADY.
Her blush is charming; would it were her own!
PIERROT.
Madame is merciless!
THE LADY.
Is that the tone?
PIERROT.
The very tone: I swear thou lackest naught.
Madame was evidently bred at Court.
THE LADY.
Thou speakest glibly: 'tis not of thine age.
PIERROT.
I listened much, as best becomes a page.
THE LADY.
I like thy Court but little —
PIERROT.
Hush! the Queen!
Bow, but not low — thou knowest what I mean.
THE LADY.
Nay, that I know not!
PIERROT.
Though she wears a crown,
'Tis from La Pompadour one fears a frown.
THE LADY.
Thou art a child: thy malice is a game.
PIERROT.
A most sweet pastime — scandal is its name.
THE LADY.
Enough, it wearies me.
PIERROT.
Then, rare Marquise,
Desert the crowd to wander through the trees.
[*He bows low, and she curtsies; they move round the stage. When they pass before the Statue he seizes her hand and falls on his knee.*]
THE LADY.
What wouldst thou now?
PIERROT.
Ah, prithee, what, save thee!

THE LADY.
Was this included in thy comedy?
PIERROT.
Ah, mock me not! In vain with quirk and jest
I strive to quench the passion in my breast;
In vain thy blandishments would make me play:
Still I desire far more than I can say.
My knowledge halts, ah, sweet, be piteous,
Instruct me still, while time remains to us,
Be what thou wist, Goddess, moon-maid, *Marquise,*
So that I gather from thy lips heart's ease,
Nay, I implore thee, think thee how time flies!
THE LADY.
Hush! I beseech thee, even now night dies.
PIERROT.
Night, day, are one to me for thy soft sake.
[*He entreats her with imploring gestures, she hesitates: then puts her finger on her lip, hushing him.*]
THE LADY.
It is too late, for hark! the birds awake.
PIERROT.
The birds awake! It is the voice of day!
THE LADY.
Farewell, dear youth! They summon me away.
[*The light changes, it grows daylight: and the music imitates the twitter of the birds. They stand gazing at the morning: then Pierrot sinks back upon his bed, he covers his face in his hands.*]
THE LADY [*bending over him*].
Music, my maids! His weary senses steep
In soft untroubled and oblivious sleep,
With Mandragore anoint his tired eyes,
That they may open on mere memories,
Then shall a vision seem his lost delight,
With love, his lady for a summer night.
Dream thou hast dreamt all this, when thou awake,
Yet still be sorrowful, for a dream's sake.
I leave thee, sleeper! Yea, I leave thee now,
Yet take my legacy upon thy brow:
Remember me, who was compassionate,
And opened for thee once, the ivory gate.
I come no more, thou shalt not see my face
When I am gone to mine exalted place:
Yet all thy days are mine, dreamer of dreams,
All silvered over with the moon's pale beams:
Go forth and seek in each fair face in vain,
To find the image of thy love again.
All maids are kind to thee, yet never one
Shall hold thy truant heart till day be done.
Whom once the moon has kissed, loves long and late,
Yet never finds the maid to be his mate.
Farewell, dear sleeper, follow out thy fate,
[*The Moon Maiden withdraws: a song is sung from behind: it is full day.*]

THE MOON MAIDEN'S SONG

Sleep! Cast thy canopy
Over this sleeper's brain,
Dim grows his memory,
When he awake again.

Love stays a summer night,
Till lights of morning come;
Then takes her wingèd flight
Back to her starry home.

Sleep! Yet thy days are mine;
Love's seal is over thee:
Far though my ways from thine,
Dim though thy memory.

Love stays a summer night,
Till lights of morning come;
Then takes her wingèd flight
Back to her starry home.

[*When the song is finished, the curtain falls upon Pierrot sleeping.*]

EPILOGUE

[*Spoken in the character of* PIERROT]

The sun is up, yet ere a body stirs,
A word with you, sweet ladies and dear sirs,
[*Although on no account let any say*
That PIERROT *finished Mr. Dowson's play*].

One night not long ago, at Baden Baden,—
The birthday of the Duke,— his pleasure garden
Was lighted gayly with feu d'artifice,
With candles, rockets, and a center-piece
Above the conversation house, on high,
Outlined in living fire against the sky,
A glittering Pierrot, *radiant, white,*
Whose heart beat fast, who danced with sheer delight,
Whose eyes were blue, whose lips were rosy red,
Whose pompons *too were fire, while on his head*
He wore a little cap, and I am told
That rockets covered him with showers of gold.
"Take our applause, you well deserve to win it,"
They cried: "Bravo! the Pierrot *of the minute!"*

What with applause and gold, one must confess
That Pierrot *had "arrived," achieved success,*
When, as it happened, presently, alas!
A terrible disaster came to pass.
His nose grew dim, the people gave a shout,
His red lips paled, both his blue eyes went out.
There rose a sullen sound of discontent,
The golden shower of rockets was all spent;
He left off dancing with a sudden jerk,
For he was nothing but a firework.
The garden darkened and the people in it
Cried, "He is dead,— the Pierrot *of the minute!"*

With every artist it is even so;
The artist, after all, is a Pierrot —
A Pierrot *of the minute,* naïf, *clever,*
But Art is back of him, She lives for ever!

Then pardon my Moon Maid and me, because
We craved the golden shower of your applause!
Pray shrive us both for having tried to win it,
And cry, "Bravo! The Pierrot *of the minute!"*

THE SUBJECTION OF KEZIA

A Play

By Mrs. Havelock Ellis

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PERSONS IN THE PLAY.

Joe Pengilly.
Kezia [*Joe Pengilly's wife*].
Matthew Trevaskis [*a friend of the Pengillys*].

The Scene *is laid in a Cornish village.*
Time: *The Present.*

The whole action of the play takes place between seven o'clock and nine o'clock on a Saturday evening.

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THE SUBJECTION OF KEZIA

A Play

By Mrs. Havelock Ellis

Scene: *Interior of a cottage kitchen in a Cornish fishing village. The walls are distempered a pale blue; the ceiling wooden and beamed. Middle of back wall, a kitchen-range where fire is burning. At back* r. *is a door opening into an inner room. At back* l. *small cupboards. At side* l. *is a large kitchen-table laid for tea under a window facing sea. The floor is red brick. On mantelpiece, white china dogs, clock, copper candlesticks, tea-caddy, stirrups, and bits. On walls, family framed photographs, religious framed pictures. Below table is a door leading into street. Behind door, roller with hanging towel. Usual kitchen paraphernalia, chairs, pots and pans, etc. Cat basket with straw to* r. *of range. At back* r. *is a wooden settle with good upright sides. Joe Pengilly is wiping his face and hands, having just come in from the pump outside. He sighs and glances uneasily at Kezia, who has her back turned to him, and is frying mackerel at the stove. He rolls down his sleeves slowly and watches his wife uneasily. He is dressed as a laborer — corduroy trousers, hob-nailed boots, blue-and-white shirt, open throat. He takes down a sleeved waistcoat from a peg behind the door and puts it on. He is a slight man with thin light hair, gentle in manner, but with a strong keen face. Kezia is a little taller than Joe — slender and graceful, with a clean cotton dress fitting well to her figure; a clean apron, well-dressed and tidy hair; good-looking and energetic. Joe smiles to himself and crosses his arms and shuffles his feet as he looks towards Kezia. Kezia turns round suddenly and looks at him sideways, the cooking-fork in one hand and the handle of the frying-pan in the other. Joe sits down at table.*]

Kezia. Why didn't thee speak?

Joe. Nothin' to say, my dear.

Kezia. Thee's not much company, for sure.

[*Joe laughs and leans his arms on the table as he looks at Kezia; his face beams as he watches her landing the fish from the bubbling fat to a dish. She puts some on a plate in front of Joe, and pours out tea in a large cup. She suddenly looks at him as he begins picking off the tail of his mackerel with his fingers.*]

Kezia. Cain't thee answer?

Joe. To what?

Kezia [*snappily*]. Why, to me, of course.

[*Joe takes a long drink of tea and gazes at her over his cup.*]

Joe. Thee'rt a great beauty, Kezia, sure enough!

[*He puts the cup down and goes on picking his fish with the fingers of one hand, while the other holds bread and butter.*]

Kezia. There you are again; always either grumblin' or jeerin' at me.

Joe. I'm not doin' neither, woman. I'm tryin' for to make up for thrawtin' of you this mornin' over they soaked crusties as I gave the cat and ruined the nice clean floor.

Kezia. Now [*angrily*], just when I were forgettin' all about it, of course you must bring it all up again, and you're tryin' now [*pointing at the fish*] all thee knows how, to make the table-cloth like a dish-clout with thy great greasy fingers!

[*Joe licks his fingers, one by one, and wipes them on his trousers, as he smiles into her cross face.*]

Kezia. Gracious! [*whimpering*] that's

thee all over. Thee gives up one dirty trick for another. I believe you only married me to clean and tidy after you.

[*Joe laughs heartily and looks up at her.*]

JOE. Heart alive! I married you because you are the only woman I've ever met in my life I could never weary of, not even if you tormented me night and day. Love of 'e, my dear, seemly, makes a real fool of me most of my time.

[*His face becomes very grave, and Kezia's brow clears as she sits down and begins to eat.*]

KEZIA. You was always one for pretty talk, Joe, but you're not a bit what you were i' deeds lately.

[*Joe hands his cup for more tea.*]

JOE. 'Cause you snap me up so.

KEZIA. There you are again, tryin' to pick a quarrel.

[*Joe pulls his chair away from the table and drags it nearer the grate. He takes his pipe from his pocket and blows into it.*]

KEZIA. Now, Joe, you know I cain't abide that 'baccy smell: it gives me a headache.

JOE. It gives me a headache to do without 'baccy.

[*Joe polishes his pipe-bowl on his sleeve, puts the stem in his mouth, and takes out some shag. Kezia watches him as she removes the tea-things. Joe watches her out of the corner of his eye as he slowly fills his pipe.*]

KEZIA. I'm fair wore out.

[*Joe gets up, puts his pipe on the mantelpiece and his knife and shag in his pocket, and advances towards Kezia. He puts his hands on her shoulders and looks in her eyes.*]

JOE. Kiss us, old girl!

KEZIA. Don't be so silly. I don't feel like it at all, and I want to be with mother again.

JOE. And married only two years!

KEZIA. It seems like six to me.

JOE. What ails thee, lass?

KEZIA. Don't keep allus askin' questions and bein' so quarrelsome; I'm mazed at the sight of 'e, sure enough. [*She folds the cloth, pokes the fire, goes into the inner room, at back* R., *and comes in again with her hat and shawl on and a basket in her hand. She looks at Joe, and wipes her eyes.*] You can sit there as long as you've a mind to, and smoke insides black and blue. I'm going to market a bit, and then I shall go into Blanch Sally and talk to she. She've got a bit of common sense. It's just on eight o'clock, and I shan't be more nor an hour or so.

[*Joe does not stir as Kezia goes out of the front door. Kezia looks back to see if he'll turn, but he does not move. He gazes into the fire with his hands clasped behind his head, and his chair tilted back.*]

JOE. I'd as soon be a dog as a man, sure enough! *They* can sit by the fire and be comfortable. [*He jumps up suddenly as he hears a knock at the door.*] Come in!

[*The street door opens softly, and Matthew Trevaskis comes in very quietly. He is a stout, short man with bushy hair and a beard. He also is dressed as a laborer. He looks at Joe and gives a low whistle.*]

MATTHEW. Hallo, mate!

JOE. Oh! you?

[*Joe sits down again, points to another chair, and looks gloomily back into the fire.*]

MATTHEW. Well, brother! Thee looks as if thee'd run out o' speerits and 'baccy both.

JOE. I'm moody, like a thing.

[*Matthew laughs and draws his chair up close to Joe. He pulls down his waistcoat, and then puts his fingers in the arm-holes, as he contemplates Joe.*]

MATTHEW. Got the hump, mate? Have 'e?

[*Joe shakes his head dolefully from side to side and sighs.*]

MATTHEW. Jaw, I suppose?

[*Joe nods.*]

MATTHEW. Thought so. I met the missus as I came along looking a bit teasy. Women's the devil that way; it's in their breed and bone, like fightin' in we. You began all wrong, like me, mate, and females always takes advantage of honeymoon ways, and stamps on we if we don't take 'em in hand at once.

[*Joe sighs, crosses his legs and looks at his friend.*]

JOE. Drat it all! I never began no different to what I am now. I cain't make things up at all. I'm fairly mazed, never having had dealin's with no female, except mother, who was mostly ill, and never in tantrums.

[*Matthew rises, pokes Joe in the ribs and laughs.*]

MATTHEW. Cheer up, brother, there's no bigger fool than a man as is sent crazy with a woman.

JOE. Women is mazy things.

MATTHEW. There's allus 'baccy for to fortify us against them, thanks be.

[*Matthew draws a little black clay pipe out of his waistcoat pocket and points to Joe's pipe on the mantelpiece as he sits down.*]

JOE. Kezia 'ates 'baccy in the house.

MTATHEW. Smoke all the time then; it's the only way.

[*Joe smiles and smoothes his thin straight hair.*]

JOE. You allus forgets I'm bent on pleasin' of Kezia.

[*Matthew stretches out his legs, and his face becomes calm and thoughtful. He speaks very deliberately.*]

MATTHEW. The more thee tries to please women, mate, the more crotchety they becomes. Within bounds I keep the peace in our place like a judge, but she've learnt, Jane Ann have, that I'll put my foot down on any out-of-the-way tantrums. Give them their heads and they'll soon have we by the heels.

JOE. Sometimes I wonder if we give 'em their heads enough. Perhaps they'd domineer less if we left 'em take their own grainy ways.

MATTHEW. You bet! If I gave in to Jane Ann entirely, where the devil do 'e think I should be at all?

[*The two men laugh together and light their pipes and smoke hard.*]

JOE. I've no notion.

MATTHEW. Well! I should be like a cat out in the rain, never certain where to put my feet. As it is, as you do know, I cain't keep no dog for fear of the mess its feet 'ud make on the floor; I cain't have a magpie in a cage 'cause its seed 'ud 'appen fall on the table. I've got to walk ginger like a rooster in wet grass for fear o' disturbin' the sand on the clean floor, and I rubs my feet on the mat afore I goes in to my meals enough to split it in half. I gives in to all things 'cause I was took captive over them, in a manner of speaking, almost afore I'd finished courting, and it takes years to understand women's fancies! It's worse nor any book learnin', is understandin' women; and then, when you think you've learnt 'em off by heart, any man 'ud fail under a first standard examination on 'em. [*He gets up and shakes Joe by the shoulder.*] Listen to me, mate! Bein' a real pal to thee, Joe, I'm warnin' of 'e now afore it's too late, for thee's only been wed two years, and there's time to alter things yet.

[*Joe suddenly gets up and goes to the door to see if it is fastened, and returns to face his friend. He takes off his long-sleeved waistcoat and throws it on a chair, after putting down his pipe.*]

JOE. Matthey!

MATTHEW. Yes?

JOE. Don't you think it is too late even now?

MATTHEW. Fur what? It's no use speakin' i' riddles, man. Trust or no trust — that's my plan. Thee's the only livin' man or woman, for the matter of that, as I've blackened Jane Ann to, and if it'll ease thy mind to tell what's worritin' of thee, you do know it's as safe as if you'd dropt your secret into the mouth of a mine shaft.

JOE. Done! Give me a hearing and let's have finished with it.

[*Matthew cleans out the bowl of his pipe and knocks the ashes out against the grate as he waits for his friend to begin. Joe stands first on one leg and then on the other and gives a long whistle.*]

MATTHEW. Sling along. It won't get no easier wi' keeping.

[*Joe wipes his forehead with a red handkerchief, which he takes out of his trouser pocket.*]

JOE. Awkward kind o' work, pullin' your lawful wife to bits.

MATTHEW. It'll get easier as thee goes on, man. I'll help thee. What's the row to-day?

JOE. Crusties.

[*Matthew winks at Joe and lights his pipe again.*]

MATTHEW. It's always some feeble thing like that as makes confusion in a house. Jane Ann began just like that. Dirty boots in the best parlor was my first offense, and it raised hell in our house for nigh on a whole day.

JOE. Well, I never! It was just the same thing in a way with me. I soaked the crusties in my tea this mornin' and threw 'em to the cat under the table, and I suppose I must 'ave put my foot in 'em, for Kezia went off like a thing gone mazy. She stormed and said—[*he sits down and wipes his forehead again with his handkerchief as he pauses*]—as she were a fool to take me, and all sorts, and then she cried fit to kill herself, and when I spoke she told me to hold my noise, and when I didn't speak she said I'd no feelin's, and was worse nor a stone. We scarcely spoke at dinner-time. She said she wished she was dead, and wanted her mother, and that, bein' a man, I was worse nor a devil; and when I kept on eatin' she said she wondered the food didn't choke me, and when I stopped eatin' she said I was never pleased wi' nothin' she'd got ready for me. My head is sore with the clang of the teasy things she drove into me, and I'm not good at replies, as you do know.

[*Joe ends in a weary voice and pokes the fire listlessly. Matthew smokes hard and his eyes are on the ground.*]

MATTHEW. Women be mysteries, and without little uns they'm worse nor monsters. A child do often alter and soften 'em, but a childless woman is as near a wolf as anything I do know.

[*Joe's elbows sink on his knees and his hands support his woebegone face. When he next speaks he has a catch in his voice, and he speaks quickly.*

JOE. That's it, is it?

MATTHEW. Iss, mate! That's the mischief. Unless—[*he looks up suddenly at Joe*]—perhaps she be goin' to surprise 'e by telling 'e she be going to have a little one. That would account for her bein' teasy and moody.

[*Joe laughs sorrowfully.*]

JOE. Lor', I should be the first to know that, surely!

MATTHEW. Not a bit of it. Women loves secrets of that sort.

JOE. No; 'tain't that at all. I only wish it was, if what you say be true of women.

MATTHEW. True enough, my son. I did the cutest day's work in my life when I persuaded Jane Ann to take little Joe to help we. I watched the two of 'em together and found he caught his tongueing, too, from she, but it had a sort of nestle sound in it as if she were a-cuddlin' of him. She've been gentler wi' me ever since Joe come back again after his long bout at home.

[*Joe scratches his head very thoughtfully; a pause, in which he seems to be thinking before speaking again.*]

JOE. I don't know of no sister's child to take on for Kezia at all. What's the next remedy, think you?

MATTHEW. A thrashin'.

[*Joe jumps up and stares at Matthew.*]

JOE. A what?

MATTHEW. Wallop her just once.

[*Matthew looks on the ground and taps it with his foot, and he does not see that Joe is standing over him with his hands clenched.*]

JOE. Shame on thee, mate! I feel more like strikin' thee nor a female. I'm sorry I told thee, if thee can offer no more help than that. I'm not much of a chap, but I've never struck a woman yet.

MATTHEW. Strike on principle, then.

[*He still looks fixedly at the floor, and Joe stands glaring at him.*]

JOE. How?

MATTHEW. Like the Almighty strikes when He've got a lesson for we to learn, which we won't learn without strikes and tears. Nothin' is of no avail to stop His chastisement if He do think it's goin' to work out His plan for He and we, and that's what I'm wanting of you to do by your wife for her sake more than for yours. Wives must learn to submit. [*Harshly.*] It's Divine Providence as 'ave ordered it, and women be miserable, like ivy and trailers of all sorts, if they've no prop to bear 'em up. Beat her once and it'll make a man of you and be a life-long warnin' to she.

JOE. But I love her, man! [*Softly.*] The very thought of hurting her makes me creep.

[*Joe shrugs his shoulders and shakes his head repeatedly.*]

MATTHEW. Women likes bein' hurt. It's a real fondlin' to 'em at times.

[*Joe sits down and folds his arms as he looks humbly at Matthew.*]

JOE. Lor', I never heard that afore. How can you be sure of that at all?

MATTHEW. I've traveled, as you do knaw. I ain't been to Africa for nothin', mate. I've seen a deal o' things, which if I'd happened on afore I courted Jane Ann would have got me through the marriage scrimmage wi' no tiles off of my roof. That's why I'm a warnin' of you afore it's too late. Your woman be worth gettin' i' trim—[*with a sigh*]—for she's—well—she's—

[*Joe's eyes rest on his friend's face and his face suddenly lights up with a smile.*]

JOE. She's the best sort of woman a man could 'ave for a sweetheart when her moods is off, and it's only lately her 'ave altered so, and I expect it's really all my fault.

MATTHEW. Certainly it is; you've never shown master yet, and you must this very night.

JOE. [*Coughs nervously.*] How?

MATTHEW. You must thrash her before it is too late. Have 'e a cane?

[*Joe jumps up, twists round his necktie, undoes it, ties it again—marches up and down the little kitchen, and wheels round on Matthew.*]

JOE. You'm a fair brute, Matthew Trevaskis.

MATTHEW. And you'm a coward, Joe Pengilly. [*Matthew clasps his hands round his raised knee and nods at Joe, who sits.*] I've given you golden advice, and if only a pal had given it to me years ago I shouldn't be in the place I'm in now, but be master of my own wife and my own chimney-corner.

[*Joe puts his hands in his pockets and tilts back his chair as he gazes up at the ceiling as if for inspiration.*]

JOE. I cain't stomach the idea at all; it's like murderin' a baby, somehow.

MATTHEW. Stuff! You needn't lay on too hard to make bruises nor nothin'.

[*Joe goes pale and puts his head in his hands for a moment, and he almost whispers.*]

JOE. Good Lord! Bruises! Why, man, she've got flesh like a flower!

[*Matthew suddenly holds out his hand to Joe, who shakes it feebly.*]

MATTHEW. I almost envies thee, mate. Why, thee's fair daft wi' love still.

JOE. Of course I be! [*Sullenly.*] She's more nor meat and drink to me; allus have been since the first I took to she.

MATTHEW. All the more reason to beat her, and at once. [*Sternly.*] You'll lose her, sure enough, if you don't. It's the only chance for thee now, and I do knaw I'm speaking gospel truth.

[*A long pause, in which Joe meditates with a grave face. He suddenly snaps the fingers of his right hand as he says quickly.*]

JOE. I'll do it. It'll nearly be the finish of me, but if you're certain sure she'll love me more after it I'll shut my eyes and set my teeth and—and—yes, upon my soul, I'll do it! She'm more to me than all the world, and I'll save she and myself with her. But are you sure it will do any good?

[*Matthew wrings Joe's hands and then slaps him on the back.*]

MATTHEW. I swear it, brother. [*Solemnly.*] I've never once known it fail.

JOE [*anxiously*]. Never once in all your travels?

[*Matthew looks down.*]

MATTHEW. Iss, mate, once, sure enough, but the woman had never cared twopence for the man to start with. After it she left 'un altogether.

JOE [*with a groan*]. Oh! Good Lord!

MATTHEW. That was no fair start like a thing. See?

JOE. No, to be sure.

MATTHEW. Now! [*He strikes Joe's shoulder briskly.*] Now for it!

[*Joe twists round towards the door, and a miserable smile is on his lips.*]

JOE. Well, what now?

[*Matthew bends down to Joe's ear and whispers.*

MATTHEW. We must go and buy the cane.

JOE. Sakes!

MATTHEW. Bear up! It'll all be over

by this time to-morrow night, and that's a great stand by, isn't it?

JOE. I suppose it is. [*Gloomily.*] Who'll be spokesman over the buyin'?

MATTHEW. Me, my son. How far will 'e go i' price?

[*Joe shakes his head and looks wearily at Matthew.*]

JOE. It's no odds to me, Matthey; I don't know and don't care!

MATTHEW. Will sixpence ruin 'e?

JOE. It's all ruin. I'm sweatin' like a bull with fear and shame, and wish I was dead and buried.

[*Matthew points to the door and the two men move slowly towards it.*]

MATTHEW. It's just on nine o'clock. Kezia will be back afore we start if we don't mind. Don't stop to think when you come back, but rush right in and set at it at once, and she'll have time to come round before you settle for the night. Bein' Saturday night, all the neighbors be mostly i' town shoppin', and if there should be a scream I'll make up a yarn to any one who comes near as 'll stop all gossip. I shan't be far off till I reckon it's all over.

[*Joe's teeth are set and his head down, and he gazes at the door and then at Matthew, irresolutely.*]

MATTHEW. Thee deserves to lose her if thee be real chicken-hearted like this 'ere.

[*Joe makes a dart forward, unlatches the door, rushes out followed by Matthew.*]

MATTHEW [*outside*]. Go round by the croft and then we shan't meet her coming home.

[*After a pause the door slowly opens and Kezia comes in. She has a basket in one hand and a string bag full of parcels in the other. She looks round, puts her parcels on the table and in the cupboards, pokes the fire, and then takes her basket in her hand again, looks at the clock and goes into the inner room. She comes back with her outdoor garments off and a loose dressing-jacket of white and blue linen over her arm. She goes to a drawer in the table and brings out a little comb and brush and stands thinking.*]

KEZIA. I'll do my hair down here. He cain't be long, and it's cold upstairs. Gone for tobacco, I suppose, and he'll want his tea when he comes in.

[*She puts the kettle on the fire. She undoes her hair, facing audience; shakes it about her shoulders, puts on her dressing-jacket and begins to brush and comb her hair before the fire, and near the settle she bends down and warms her hands, singing a lullaby as she does so. She then stands facing the fire, smiling to herself as she sings. So absorbed is she in her thoughts that she does not see the street-door open and the white, scared face of Joe appear. He puts his hands behind his back when he has softly shut the door, and tip-toes towards Kezia, who never sees him till he has sat down swiftly on the settle, the further corner to where she stands. His left hand, with the cane in it, is not visible to Kezia, as it is hidden by the end of the settle. Tying a large plait on one side of her head — the nearest to him — with pink ribbon, she suddenly turns round and sees him, and their eyes meet. She sits down by him. Kezia's face is very sweet and smiling as she tosses the plait over her shoulder.*]

KEZIA. Seen a ghost, Joey, my dear, or is it Kezia come to her senses at last, think you?

[*Joe does not stir. He gazes at Kezia with a puzzled and tender expression.*]

JOE. What's come to thee, lass?

KEZIA. Guess!

[*Kezia clasps her hands behind her head and looks into Joe's face with a happy smile.*]

JOE. Cain't at all.

KEZIA. Come close, sweetheart.

[*She draws nearer to Joe, who does not move, and tries to keep the cane hidden. He suddenly draws her close to him with his right arm, and whispers.*]

JOE. Kezia.

KEZIA [*softly*]. Joey, my dear! [*She nestles closer to him and puts her head on his shoulder.*] He'll be the dearest little thing a woman ever bore.

[*Joe laughs softly, kisses Kezia gent-*

ly on the eyes, brow, and then mouth, and holds her closely to him.]

JOE. Heaven cain't be more desirable than this.

KEZIA. To think there'll be three of us soon. You see now why I've been so teasy lately. Now I'll sing all day long so he'll be a happy boy.

[*Joe does not move. He makes furtive attempts to hide the cane behind the settle, and moves a little as he continues to smile at Kezia.*]

KEZIA. Thee'rt smiling, Joe! Thee and me 'ave both hungered for the same thing. Did thee guess it at all, I wonder? I've kept it from thee a while to make sure. But, lor'! my dear life! whatever be this that you've got here? [*She pulls the long cane out of Joe's hands and holds it in hers. They both look at it very solemnly for a few moments, and Joe scratches his head sadly, unable to speak. She bursts into a merry laugh and her lips tremble.*] Eh! Joe! lad! [*softly*]. Thee was always unlike other chaps; that's why I do love thee so. Fancy thee guessing, and going to buy him somethin' right away! [*She puts her face in her hands and sobs and laughs together.*] Oh! it brings it so near like. Most men would have thought of a cradle or a rattle, but thee! Oh! my dear! [*She throws her arms round his neck and kisses him on the mouth.*] Thee thought of the first beatin' we should be forced to give him, for, of course, he'll be a lad of tremenjous spirit.

JOE [*suddenly, and snatching the cane from Kezia.*] So he will. Both his father and mother be folk of great spirit, and — the first time as he dirts the tablecloth or frets his mother, I'll lay it on him as, thanks be, I've never laid it on nobody yet.

[*Curtain.*]

THE CONSTANT LOVER

A Comedy of Youth

By St. John Hankin

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"As of old when the world's heart was lighter."

THE CONSTANT LOVER was first produced at the Royalty Theatre, London, January 30, 1912, under the direction of Messrs. Vedrenne and Eadie, with the following cast:

EVELYN RIVERS.....*Miss Gladys Cooper.*
CECIL HARBURTON.....*Mr. Dennis Eadie.*

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THE CONSTANT LOVER

A Comedy

By J. H. Speenhoff

[*Before the curtain rises the orchestra will play the Woodland Music (cuckoo) from "Hansel and Gretel" and possibly some of the Grieg Pastoral Music from "Peer Gynt," or some Gabriél Fauré.*

Scene: *A glade in a wood. About c. a great beech-tree, the branches of which overhang the stage, the brilliant sunlight filtering through them. The sky where it can be seen through the branches is a cloudless blue.*

When the curtain rises Cecil Harburton is discovered sitting on the ground under the tree, leaning his back against its trunk and reading a book. He wears a straw hat and the lightest of gray flannel suits. The chattering of innumerable small birds is heard while the curtain is still down, and this grows louder as it rises, and we find ourselves in the wood. Presently a wood pigeon coos in the distance. Then a thrush begins to sing in the tree above Cecil's head and is answered by another. After a moment Cecil looks up.]

Cecil. By Jove, that's jolly! [*Listens for a moment, then returns to his book.*]

[*Suddenly a cuckoo begins to call insistently. After a moment or two he looks up again.*]

Cuckoo too! Bravo! [*Again he returns to his book.*]

[*A moment later enter Evelyn Rivers. She also wears the lightest of summer dresses, as it is a cloudless day in May. On her head is a shady straw hat. As she approaches the tree a twig snaps under her foot and Cecil looks up. He jumps to his feet, closing book, and advances to her, eagerly holding out his right hand, keeping the book in his left.*]

[*Reproachfully.*] Here you are at last!

Evelyn. At last?

Cecil. Yes. You're awfully late! [*Looks at watch.*]

Evelyn. Am I?

Cecil. You know you are. I expected you at three.

Evelyn. Why? I never said I'd come at three. Indeed, I never *said* I'd come at all.

Cecil. No.—But it's always been three.

Evelyn. Has it?

Cecil. And now it's half-past. I consider I've been cheated out of a whole half-hour.

Evelyn. I couldn't help it. Mother kept me. She wanted the roses done in the drawing-room.

Cecil. How stupid of Mrs. Rivers!

Evelyn. Mr. Harburton!

Cecil. What's the matter?

Evelyn. I don't think you *ought* to call my mother stupid.

Cecil. Why not—if she is stupid? Most parents are stupid, by the way. I've noticed it before. Mrs. Rivers ought to have thought of the roses earlier. The morning is the proper time to gather roses. Didn't you tell her that?

Evelyn. I'm afraid I couldn't very well. You see it was really *I* who ought to have thought of the roses! I always do them. But this morning I forgot.

Cecil. I see. [*Turning towards the tree.*] Well, sit down now you *are* here. Isn't it a glorious day?

Evelyn [*hesitating*]. I don't believe I *ought* to sit down.

Cecil [*turns to her*]. Why not? There's no particular virtue about standing, is there? I hate standing. So let's sit down and be comfortable.

[*She sits, so does he. She sits on bank under tree, left of it. He sits below bank to right of tree.*]

EVELYN. But *ought* I to be sitting here with you? That's what I mean. It's — not as if I really *knew* you, is it?

CECIL. Not *know* me? [*The chatter of birds dies away.*]

EVELYN. Not properly — we've never even been introduced. We just met quite by chance here in the wood.

CECIL. Yes. [*Ecstatically.*] What a glorious chance!

EVELYN. Still, I'm sure mother wouldn't approve.

CECIL. And *you* say Mrs. Rivers isn't stupid!

EVELYN [*laughing*]. I expect most people would agree with her. Most people would say you oughtn't to have spoken to a girl you didn't know like that.

CECIL. Oh, come, I only asked my way back to the inn.

EVELYN. There was no harm in asking your way, of course. But then we began talking of other things. And then we sat down under this tree. And we've sat under this tree every afternoon since. And that was a week ago.

CECIL. Well, it's such an awfully jolly tree.

EVELYN. I don't know *what* mother would say if she heard of it!

CECIL. Would it be something unpleasant?

EVELYN [*ruefully*]. I'm afraid it would.

CECIL. How fortunate you don't know it then.

EVELYN [*pondering*]. Still, if I really *oughtn't* to be here. . . . Do *you* think I oughtn't to be here?

CECIL. I don't think I should go into that if I were you. Sensible people think of what they want to do, not of what they *ought* to do, otherwise they get confused. And then of course they do the wrong thing.

EVELYN. But if I do what I oughtn't, I generally find I'm sorry for it afterwards.

CECIL. Not half sorry as you would have been if you hadn't done it. In this world the things one regrets are the things one hasn't done. For instance, if I hadn't spoken to you a week ago here in the wood I should have regretted it all my life.

EVELYN. Would you?

[*He nods.*]

Really and truly?

CECIL [*nods*]. Really and truly.

[*He lays his hand on hers for a moment, she lets it rest there. Cuckoo calls loudly once or twice — she draws her hand away.*

EVELYN. There's the cuckoo.

[*Cecil rises and sits up on bank R. of her, leaning against tree.*]

CECIL. Yes. Isn't he jolly? Don't you love cuckoos?

EVELYN. They *are* rather nice.

CECIL. Aren't they! And such clever beggars. Most birds are fools — like most people. As soon as they're grown up they go and get married, and then the rest of their lives are spent in bringing up herds of children and wondering how on earth to pay their school-bills. Your cuckoo sees the folly of all that. No school-bills for *her!* No nursing the baby! She just flits from hedgerow to hedgerow flirting with other cuckoos. And when she lays an egg she lays it in some one else's nest, which saves all the trouble of housekeeping. Oh, a wise bird!

EVELYN [*pouting, looking away from him*]. I don't know that I *do* like cuckoos so much after all. They sound to me rather selfish.

CECIL. Yes. But so sensible! The duck's a wise bird too in her way. [*She turns to him.*] But *her* way's different from the cuckoo's. [*Matter-of-fact.*] She always *treads* on *her* eggs.

EVELYN. Clumsy creature!

CECIL. Not a bit. She does it on purpose. You see, it's much less trouble than *sitting* on them. As soon as she's laid an egg she raises one foot absent-mindedly and gives a warning quack. Whereupon the farmer rushes up, takes it away, and puts it under some wretched hen, who has to do the sitting for her. I call that genius!

EVELYN. Genius!

CECIL. Yes. Genius is the infinite capacity for making other people take pains.

EVELYN. How can you say that?

CECIL. I didn't. Carlyle did.

EVELYN. I don't believe he said any-

thing of the kind. And I don't believe ducks are clever one bit. They don't look clever.

CECIL. That's part of their cleverness. In this world if one *is* wise one should look like a fool. It puts people off their guard. That's what the duck does.

EVELYN. Well, I think ducks are horrid, and cuckoos, too. And I believe most birds *like* bringing up their chickens and feeding them and looking after them.

CECIL. They do. That's the extraordinary part of it. They spend their whole lives building nests and laying eggs and hatching them. And when the chickens come out the father has to fuss round finding worms. And the nest's abominably over-crowded and the babies are perpetually squalling, and that drives the husband to the public house, and it's all as uncomfortable as the Devil —

EVELYN. Mr. Harburton!

CECIL. Well, *I* shouldn't like it. In fact, I call it fatuous.

[*Evelyn is leaning forward pondering this philosophy with a slightly puckered brow — a slight pause*]. I say, *you* don't look a bit comfortable like that. Lean back against the tree. It's a first-rate tree. That's why I chose it.

EVELYN [*tries and fails*]. I can't. My hat gets in the way.

CECIL. Take it off then.

EVELYN. I think I will. [*Does so.*] That's better. [*Leans back luxuriously against the trunk; puts her hat down on bank beside her.*]

CECIL. Much better. [*Looks at her with frank admiration.*] By Jove, you *do* look jolly without your hat!

EVELYN. Do I?

CECIL. Yes. Your hair's such a jolly color. I noticed it the first time I saw you. You had your hat off then, you know. You were walking through the wood fanning yourself with it. And directly I caught sight of you the sun came out and simply flooded your hair with light. And there was the loveliest pink flush on your cheeks, and your eyes were soft and shining —

EVELYN [*troubled*]. Mr. Harburton, you mustn't say things to me like that.

CECIL. Mustn't I? Why not? Don't you like being told you look jolly?

EVELYN [*naïvely*]. I do *like* it, of course. But *ought* you . . . ?

CECIL [*groans*]. Oh, it's *that* again.

EVELYN. I mean, it's not *right* for men to say those things to girls.

CECIL. I don't see that — if they're true. You *are* pretty and your eyes *are* soft and your cheeks — why, they're flushing at this moment! [*Triumphant.*] Why shouldn't I say it?

EVELYN. Please! . . . [*She stops, and her eyes fill with tears.*]

CECIL [*much concerned*]. Miss Rivers, what's the matter? Why, I believe you're crying!

EVELYN [*sniffing suspiciously*]. I'm . . . not.

CECIL. You are, I can see the tears. Have I said anything to hurt you? What is it? Tell me. [*Much concerned.*]

EVELYN [*recovering herself by an effort*]. It's nothing, nothing really. I'm all right now. Only you won't say things to me like that again, will you? Promise. [*Taking out handkerchief.*]

CECIL. I promise . . . if you really wish it. And now dry your eyes and let's be good children. That's what my nurse used to say when my sister and I quarreled. Shall I dry them for you? [*Takes her handkerchief and does so tenderly.*]

EVELYN [*with a gulp*]. Thank you. [*Takes away handkerchief.*] How absurd you are! [*Puts it away.*]

CECIL. Thank *you!*

[*Evelyn moves down, sitting at bottom of bank, a little below him.*]

EVELYN. Did you often quarrel with your sister?

CECIL. Perpetually. *And* my brothers. Didn't you?

EVELYN. I never had any.

CECIL. Poor little kid. You must have been rather lonely.

EVELYN [*matter-of-fact*]. There was always Reggie.

CECIL. Reggie?

EVELYN. My cousin, Reggie Townsend. He lived with us when we were children. His parents were in India.

CECIL [*matter-of-fact*]. So he used to quarrel with you instead.

EVELYN [*shocked*]. Oh no! We *never* quarreled. At least, Reggie never did. *I* did sometimes.

CECIL. How dull! There's no good in quarreling if people won't quarrel back.

EVELYN. I don't think there's *any good* in quarreling at all.

CECIL. Oh, yes, there is. There's the making it up again.

EVELYN. Was that why you used to quarrel with your sister?

CECIL. I expect so, though I didn't know it, of course — then. I used to tease her awfully, I remember, and pull her hair. She had awfully jolly hair. Like yours — oh! I forgot, I mustn't say that. Used you to pull Reggie's hair?

EVELYN [*laughing*]. I'm afraid I did sometimes.

CECIL. I was sure of it. How long was he with you?

EVELYN. Till he went to Winchester. And of course he used to be with us in the holidays after that. And he comes to us now whenever he can get away for a few days. He's in his uncle's office in the city. He'll be a partner some day.

CECIL. Poor chap!

EVELYN. *Poor* chap! Mother says he's very *fortunate*.

CECIL. She would. Parents always think it very fortunate when young men have to go to an office every day. I know mine do.

EVELYN. *Do* you go to an office every day?

CECIL. No.

EVELYN [*with dignity*]. Then I don't think you can know much about it, can you?

CECIL [*carelessly*]. I know too much. That's why I don't go.

EVELYN. What *do* you do?

CECIL. I don't do anything. I'm at the Bar.

EVELYN. If you're at the Bar, why are you down here instead of up in London working?

CECIL. Because if I were in London I might possibly get a brief. It's not likely, but it's possible. And if I got a brief I should have to be mugging in chambers, or wrangling in a stuffy court, instead of sitting under a tree in the shade with you.

EVELYN. But *ought* you to waste your time like that?

CECIL [*genuinely shocked*]. *Waste* my time! To sit under a tree — a really nice tree like this — talking to *you*. You can call that *wasting time!*

EVELYN. Isn't it?

CECIL. No! To sit in a frowsy office adding up figures when the sky's blue and the weather's heavenly, *that's* wasting time. The only real way in which one can waste time is not to enjoy it, to spend one's day blinking at a ledger and never notice how beautiful the world is, and how good it is to be alive. To be only making money when one might be making love, *that* is wasting time!

EVELYN. How earnestly you say that!

[*Cecil leans forward — close to her.*]

CECIL. Isn't it true?

EVELYN [*troubled*]. Perhaps it is. [*Looks away from him.*]

CECIL. You know it is. Every one knows it. Only people won't admit it. [*Leaning towards her and looking into her eyes.*] You know it at this moment.

EVELYN [*returning his gaze slowly*]. I think I do.

[*For a long moment they look into each other's eyes. Then he takes her two hands, draws her slowly towards him and kisses her gently on the lips.*]

CECIL. Ah! [*Sigh of satisfaction. He releases her hands and leans back against the tree again.*]

EVELYN [*sadly*]. Oh, Mr. Harburton, you *oughtn't* to have done that!

CECIL. Why not?

EVELYN. Because . . . [*Hesitates.*] Because you *oughtn't*. . . . Because men *oughtn't* to kiss girls.

CECIL [*scandalized*]. Oughtn't to kiss girls! What nonsense! What on earth were girls made for if not to be kissed?

EVELYN. I mean they *oughtn't* . . . unless . . . [*Looking away.*]

CECIL [*puzzled*]. Unless?

EVELYN [*looking down*]. Unless they *love* them.

CECIL [*relieved*]. But I *do* love you. Of course I love you. That's why I kissed you.

[*A thrush is heard calling in the distance.*]

EVELYN. Really? [*Cecil nods. Evelyn sighs contentedly.*] That makes it all right then.

CECIL. I should think it did. And as it's all right I may kiss you again, mayn't I?

EVELYN [*shyly*]. If you like.

CECIL. You darling! [*Takes her in his arms and kisses her long and tenderly.*] Lean your head on my shoulder,

you'll find it awfully comfortable. [*He leans back against the tree.*] [*She does so.*] There! Is that all right?

EVELYN. Quite. [*Sigh of contentment.*]

CECIL. *How* pretty your hair is! I always thought your hair lovely. And it's as soft as silk. I always knew it would be like silk. [*Strokes it.*] Do you like me to stroke your hair?

EVELYN. Yes!

CECIL. Sensible girl! [*Pause; he laughs happily.*] I say, what am I to call you? Do you know, I don't even know your Christian name yet?

EVELYN. Don't you?

CECIL. No. You've never told me. What is it? Mine's Cecil.

EVELYN. Mine's Evelyn.

CECIL. Evelyn? Oh, I don't like Evelyn. It's rather a *stodgy* sort of name. I think I shall call you Eve. Does any one else call you Eve?

EVELYN. No.

CECIL. Then I shall certainly call you Eve. After the first woman man ever loved. May I?

EVELYN. If you like — Cecil.

CECIL. That's settled then.

[*He kisses her again. Pause of utter happiness, during which he settles her head more comfortably on his shoulder, and puts arm round her.*]

Isn't it heavenly to be in love?

EVELYN. Heavenly!

CECIL. There's nothing like it in the whole world! Say so.

EVELYN. Love is the most beautiful thing in the whole world.

CECIL. Good girl! There's a reward for saying it right. [*Kisses her.*]

[*Pause of complete happiness for both.*]

EVELYN [*meditatively*]. I'm afraid Reggie won't be pleased.

[*The chatter of sparrows is heard.*]

CECIL [*indifferently*]. Won't he?

EVELYN [*shakes her head*]. No. You see, Reggie's in love with me too. He always has been in love with me, for years and years. [*Sighs.*] Poor Reggie!

CCIL. On the contrary. Happy Reggie!

EVELYN [*astonished*]. What *do* you mean?

CECIL. To have been in love with you years and years. *I've* only been in love with you a week. . . . I've only known you a week.

EVELYN. I'm afraid Reggie didn't look at it like that.

CECIL [*nods*]. No brains.

EVELYN. You see, I always refused *him.*

CECIL. Exactly. And he always went on loving you. What more could the silly fellow want?

EVELYN [*shyly, looking up at him*]. He *wanted* me to accept him, I suppose.

[*The bird chatter dies away.*]

CECIL. Ah! . . . Reggie ought to read Keats's "Ode to a Grecian Urn." . . . I say, what jolly eyes you've got! I noticed them the moment we met here in the wood. That was why I spoke to you.

EVELYN [*demurely*]. I thought it was to ask your way back to the inn.

CECIL. That was an excuse. I knew the way as well as you did. I'd only just come from there. But when I saw you with the sunshine on your pretty soft hair and lighting up your pretty soft eyes, I said I *must* speak to her. And I did. Are you glad I spoke to you?

EVELYN. Yes.

CECIL. Glad and glad?

EVELYN. Yes.

CECIL. Good girl! [*Leans over and kisses her cheek.*]

EVELYN [*sigh of contentment; sits up*]. And now we must go and tell mother.

CECIL [*with a comic groan*]. Need we?

EVELYN [*brightly*]. Of course.

CECIL [*sigh*]. Well, if *you* think so.

EVELYN [*laughing*]. You don't seem to look forward to it much.

CECIL. I don't. That's the part I always hate.

EVELYN. *Always?* [*Starts forward and looks at him, puzzled.*]

CECIL [*quite unconscious*]. Yes. The going to the parents and all that. Parents really are the most preposterous people. They've no feeling for *romance* whatever. You meet a girl in a wood. It's May. The sun's shining. There's not a cloud in the sky. She's adorably pretty. You fall in love. Everything heavenly! Then — why, I can't imagine — she wants you to tell her mother. Well, you do tell her mother. And her mother at once begins to ask you what your profession is, and how much money

you earn, and how much money you have that you don't earn — and that spoils it all.

EVELYN [*bewildered*]. But I don't understand. You talk as if you had actually done all this before.

CECIL. So I have. Lots of times.

EVELYN. Oh! [*Jumps up from the ground and faces him, her eyes flashing with rage.*]

CECIL. I say, don't get up. It's not time to go yet. It's only four. Sit down again.

EVELYN [*struggling for words*]. Do you mean to say you've been in love with girls before? *Other* girls?

CECIL [*apparently genuinely astonished at the question*]. Of course I have.

EVELYN. And been engaged to them?

CECIL. Not engaged. I've never been engaged so far. But I've been in love over and over again.

[*Evelyn stamps her foot with rage — turning away from him.*]

My dear girl, what *is* the matter? You look quite cross. [*Rises.*]

EVELYN [*furious*]. And you're not even *ashamed* of it?

CECIL [*roused to sit up by this question*]. Ashamed of it? Ashamed of being in love? How can you say such a thing! Of course I'm not ashamed. What's the good of being alive at all if one isn't to be in love? I'm perpetually in love. In fact, I'm hardly ever out of love — with somebody.

EVELYN [*still furious*]. Then if you're in love, why don't you get engaged? A man has no business to make love to a girl and not be engaged to her. It's not right.

CECIL [*reasoning with her*]. That's the parents' fault. I told you parents were preposterous people. They won't allow me to get engaged.

EVELYN. Why not?

CECIL. Oh, for different reasons. They say I'm not *serious* enough. Or that I don't work enough. Or that I haven't got enough money. Or else they simply say they "don't think I'm fitted to make their daughter happy." Anyhow, they won't sanction an engagement. They all agree about *that*. Your mother would be just the same.

[*Impatient exclamation from Evelyn.*]

I don't blame her. I don't say she's not right. don't say they haven't all been right. In fact, I believe they *have* been right. I'm only explaining how it is.

EVELYN [*savagely*]. *I* see how it is. You don't really want to be married.

CECIL. Of course I don't *want* to be married. Nobody does unless he's perfectly idiotic. One wants to be in love. Being in love's splendid. And I dare say being engaged isn't bad — though I've had no experience of that so far. But being married must be simply hateful.

EVELYN [*boiling with rage*]. Nonsense! How can it be hateful to be married if it's splendid to be in love?

[*The cuckoo is heard.*]

CECIL. Have you forgotten the cuckoo?

EVELYN. Oh!!!

CECIL. No ties, no responsibilities, no ghastly little villa with children bellowing in the nursery. Just life in the open hedgerow. Life and love. Happy cuckoo!

EVELYN [*furious*]. I think cuckoos detestable. They're mean, horrid, *disgusting* birds.

CECIL. No. No. I can't have you abusing cuckoos. They're particular friends of mine. In fact, I'm a sort of cuckoo myself.

EVELYN [*turning on him*]. Oh, I hate you! I hate you! [*Stamps her foot.*]

CECIL [*with quiet conviction*]. You don't.

EVELYN. I do!

CECIL [*shaking his head*]. You don't. [*Quite gravely.*] One never really hates the people one has once loved.

[*He looks into her eyes. For a moment or two she returns his gaze fiercely. Then her eyes fall and they fill with tears.*]

EVELYN [*half crying*]. How horrid you are to say that!

CECIL. Why?

EVELYN. Because it's true, I suppose. Ah, I'm so unhappy! [*Begins to cry.*]

CECIL [*genuinely distressed*]. Eve! You're crying. You mustn't do that. I can't bear seeing people cry. [*Lays hand on her shoulder.*]

EVELYN [*shaking it off*]. Don't. I can't bear you to touch me. After falling in love with one girl after another like that. When I thought you were only in love with me.

CECIL. So I am only in love with you — now.

EVELYN [*tearfully*]. But I thought you'd never been in love with any one else. And I let you call me Eve because you said she was the first woman man ever loved.

CECIL. But I never said she was the only one, did I? [*Argumentatively.*] And one can't *help* being in love with people when one *is* in love, can one? I couldn't *help* falling in love with you, for instance, the moment I saw you. You looked simply splendid. It was such a splendid day too. *Of course* I fell in love with you.

EVELYN [*slightly appeased by his compliment, drying her eyes*]. But you seem to fall in love with such a lot of people.

CECIL. I do. [*Mischievously.*] But ought *you* to throw stones at me? After all, being in love with more than one person is no worse than having more than one person in love with you. How about Reggie?

EVELYN. Reggie? [*The sparrows' chatter starts again.*]

CECIL [*nods*]. Reggie's in love with you, isn't he? So am I. And both at once too! I'm only in love with one person at a time.

EVELYN [*rebelliously*]. I can't help Reggie being in love with me.

CECIL. And I can't help *my* being in love with you. That's just my point. I knew you'd see it.

EVELYN. I don't see it at all. Reggie is quite different from you. Reggie's love is true and constant. . . .

CECIL. Well, I'm a *constant* lover if you come to that.

EVELYN. You aren't. You know you aren't.

CECIL. Yes, I am. A constant lover is a lover who is constantly in love.

EVELYN. Only with the same person.

CECIL. It doesn't say so. It only says constant.

EVELYN [*half-laughing*]. How ridiculous you are! [*Turns away.*]

CECIL [*sigh of relief*]. That's right. Now you're good-tempered again.

EVELYN. I'm not.

CECIL. What a story!

EVELYN. I'm not. I'm very, *very* angry.

CECIL. That's impossible. You can't possibly be angry and laugh at the same time, can you? No one can. And you *did* laugh. You're doing it now.

[*She does so unwillingly.*]

So don't let's quarrel any more. It's absurd to quarrel on such a fine day, isn't it? Let's make it up, and be lovers again.

[*The sparrows die away.*]

EVELYN [*shaking her head*]. No.

CECIL. Please!

EVELYN [*shaking her head*]. No.

CECIL. Well, you're very foolish. Love isn't a thing to throw away. It's too precious for that. Love is the most beautiful thing in the whole world. You said so yourself not ten minutes ago.

EVELYN. I didn't. You said it. [*Looking down.*]

CECIL. But you said it after me. [*Gently and gravely.*] Eve, dear, don't be silly. Let's be in love while we can. Youth is the time to be in love, isn't it? Soon you and I will be dull and stupid and middle-aged like all the other tedious people. And then it will be too late. Youth passes so quickly. Don't let's waste a second of it. They say the May-fly only lives for one day. He is born in the morning. All the afternoon he flutters over the river in the sunshine, dodging the trout and flirting with other May-flies. And at evening he dies. Think of the poor May-fly who happens to be born on a wet day! The tragedy of it!

EVELYN [*softly*]. Poor May-fly.

CECIL. There! You're sorry for the May-fly, you see. You're only angry with me.

EVELYN. Because you're not a May-fly.

CECIL. Yes, I am. A sort of May-fly.

EVELYN [*with suspicion of tears in her voice*]. You aren't. How can you be? Besides, you said you were a cuckoo just now.

CECIL. I suppose I'm a cuckoo-May-fly. For I *hate* wet days. And if you're going to cry again, it might just as well be wet, mightn't it? So do dry your eyes like a good girl. Let me do it for you. [*Does it with her handkerchief.*]

[*She laughs ruefully.*]

There, that's better. And now we're going to be good children again, aren't we?

CECIL [*holding out hand*]. And you'll kiss and be friends?

EVELYN. I'll be friends, of course. [*Sadly.*] But you must never kiss me again.

CECIL. What a shame! Why not?

EVELYN. Because you mustn't.

CECIL [*cheerfully*]. Well, you'll sit down again anyhow, won't you? just to show we've made it up. [*Moves towards tree.*]

EVELYN [*shakes head*]. No.

CECIL [*disappointed; turns*]. A . . . Then you haven't really made it up.

EVELYN. Yes, I have. [*Picks up her hat.*] But I must go now. Reggie's coming down by the five o'clock train, and I want to be at the station to meet him. [*Holds out hand.*] Good-by, Mr. Harburton.

CECIL [*taking hand*]. Eve! You're going to accept Reggie! [*Pause.*]

EVELYN [*half to herself*]. I wonder.

CECIL. And he'll have to tell your mother?

EVELYN. Of course.

CECIL [*drops her hand*]. Poor Reggie! So *his* romance ends too!

EVELYN. It won't!. If I marry Reggie I shall make him very happy.

CECIL. Very likely. Marriage may be happiness, but I'm hanged if it's romance!

EVELYN. Oh! [*Exclamation of impatience.*]

[*She turns away and exits* R.]

[*Cecil watches her departure with a smile half-amused, half-pained, till she is long out of sight. Then with half a sigh turns back to his tree.*]

CECIL [*re-seating himself*]. Poor Reggie! [*Re-opens his book and settles himself to read again.*]

[*A cuckoo hoots loudly from a distant thicket and is answered by another. Cecil looks up from his book to listen as the curtain falls.*]

[*Curtain.*]

THE JUDGMENT OF INDRA

A Play

By Dhan Gopal Mukerji

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THE JUDGMENT OF INDRA

A Play

By Dhan Gopal Mukerji

[Time: *The Fifteenth Century.*]

[Place: *A Monastery on one of the foothills of Himalaya.*]

[Sene: *In the foreground is the outer court of a Monastery. In the center of the court is a sacred plant, growing out of a small altar of earth about two feet square. On the left of the court is a sheer precipice, adown which a flight of stone steps — only a few of which are visible — connects the Monastery with the village in the valley below.*

To the right are the temple and the adobe walls and the roof of the monastery cells. There is a little space between the temple and the adobe walls, which is the passage leading to the inner recesses of the monastery. Several steps lead to the doors of the temple, which give on the court. In the distance, rear, are the snowy peaks of the Himalayas, glowing under the emerald sky of an Indian afternoon. To the left, the distances stretch into vast spaces of wooded hills. Long bars of light glimmer and die as the vast clouds, with edges of crimson, golden and silver, spread portentously over the hills and forest.

A roll of thunder in the distance, accompanies the rise of the curtain.]

Shanta. [*He is reading a palm-leaf manuscript near the Sacred Plant. He looks up at the sky.*] It forbodes a calamity.

[*Suddenly the Temple doors open. Shukra stands framed in the doorway. Seeing that Shanta is alone, Shukra walks down the steps toward him.*]

Shukra. Are you able to make out the words?

Shanta. Aye, Master.

Shukra. Where is Kanada?

Shanta. He will be here presently. Listen, master: it sayeth: "Only a hair's breadth divides the true from the false. Upon him who by thought, word or deed confuses the two, will descend the Judgment of Indra."

Shukra. The thunder of Indra is just. It will strike the erring and the unrighteous no matter where they hide themselves; in the heart of the forest or in the silence of the cloisters, Indra's Judgment will descend on them. Even the erring heart that knows not that it is erring will be smitten and chastised by Indra. [*Thunder rumbles in the distance.*]

Shanta. Master, when you speak, you not only fill the heart with ecstasy, but also the soul with the beauty of truth.

Shukra. To praise is good. But why praise me, who have yet to find God and,— [*Shakes his head sadly.*]

Shanta. You will find Him soon; your time is nigh.

Shukra. I wish it were true.

Shanta. Master, if there be anything that I can do for you. If I could only lighten your burden a little,—

Shukra. Thou hast done that already. All the cares of the monastery thou hast taken from me. Thou hast bound me to thee by bonds of gratitude that can never break. [*Enter Kanada.*] Ah, Kanada, how be it with you to-day? [*Coming to him.*]

Kanada. [*He is a lad of twenty and two.*] By your blessing I am well and at peace. Have you finished your meditation?

Shukra. [*Sadly.*] Nine hours have I meditated, but — I shall say the prayers now. [*Enters the temple and shuts the door.*]

Kanada. He seems not to be himself.

Shanta. When he is in meditation for a long time, he becomes another being.

Kanada. There is sadness in his eyes.

Shanta. How can he be sad,— he who

has risen above joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, hate and love?

KANADA. Above love, too?

SHANTA. Yea, hate and love being opposite, are Maya, illusion!

KANADA. Yet we must love the world.

SHANTA. Yea, that we do to help the world.

KANADA. The Master is tender to the villagers even if they lead the worldly life.

SHANTA. We be monks. We have broken all the ties of the world, even those of family, so that we can bestow our thoughts, care and love upon all the children of God. Our love is impartial. [*The thunder growls in the distance.*]

KANADA. Yea, that is the truth. Yet I think the Master loves thee more than any other.

SHANTA. Nay, brother. He loves no one more than another. I have been with him ten years; that makes him depend on me. But if the truth were known,— he loves none. For he loves all. Indra, be my witness: the Master loveth no one more than another.

KANADA. Ah, noble-souled Master! Yet I feel happy to think that he loveth thee more than any.

SHANTA. He loves each living creature. He is not as the worldly ones who love by comparison — this one more, the other less. Last night, as the rain wailed without like a heart-broken woman, how his voice rose in song of light and love! He is one of God's prophets, and a true singer of His praise.

KANADA. I can hear him yet.

SHANTA. I will never forget the ineffable joy that glowed in his words. Only he who has renounced all ties, can speak with such deep and undying love. No anxiety —

KANADA. It was that of which I would speak to thee. Dost thou not see sadness and anxiety in the Master's face?

SHANTA. He is deep in thought — naught else.

KANADA. Ever since that message was brought him the other day, he has seemed heavy hearted. It was melancholy tidings.

SHANTA. Nay, that message had naught to do with him. [*Thunder growls. The Temple doors open. Shukra comes out of the Temple and shuts the doors behind him. Then he stands still in front of the Temple.*]

SHUKRA. [*Calling.*] Kanada.

KANADA. Yea, Master. [*He goes up to Shukra, who gives him some directions. Kanada exits; Shukra stands looking at the sky.*]

SHANTA. How wonderful a vision he is! As he stands at the threshold of the temple he seems like a new God, another divinity come down to earth to lead the righteous on to the realms celestial. Ah, Master, how grateful am I to have thee as my teacher! I thank Brahma for giving thee to me.

[*Enter Kanada. Shukra then walks to Shanta, with Kanada following him.*]

KANADA. Master, all is ready.

SHUKRA. Go ye to the village; ask them if all be well with them. When the heavens are unkind — ah, if it rains another day all the crops will be destroyed. What will they live on? No, no, it cannot be. Go ye both down to them and take them my blessings: Tell them we will make another offering to Indra tonight. It must not rain any more.

SHANTA. Bring out begging bowls, Kanada.

KANADA. Shall I bring the torches, too? [*Crossing.*]

SHUKRA. The clouds may hide the moon; yea, the torches, too. [*Kanada exits* R.]

SHUKRA. Yea. [*Thunder growls above head.*] The storm grows apace. I hope thou wilt find shelter ere it breaks. [*A short silence.*] The world is growing darker and darker each day. Sin and Vice are gathering around it like a vast coiling Serpent. We monks be the only ones that can save it and set it free. Shanta, be steadfast; strengthen me. Help me to bring the light to the world. Thou art not only my disciple, but my friend and brother. [*He embraces Shanta.*] Save me from the world.

KANADA. [*Entering.*] Here be — [*Stops in surprise.*]

SHUKRA. [*Releasing Shanta.*] Come to me, Kanada. [*The latter does so, Shukra putting an arm around Kanada's neck.*] Little Brother —

KANADA. [*Radiantly.*] Master —

SHUKRA. Be brave and free — free from the delusions of this world, San-

sara. Go yet to the village; take them our blessings! Hari be with them all! May ye return hither safely. [*Thunder and lightning.*] Ah, Lord Indra! — Look, it is raining yonder. Go, hasten —

SHANTA. [*Taking a begging bowl and torch from Kanada.*] Come!

SHUKRA. [*Putting his hands on their heads.*] I bless ye both. May Indra protect ye —[*the rest of his words are drowned by the lightning flash and peal of thunder*].

[*The two disciples intone:* "OM Shanti OM." *They go down the steps.*]

SHUKRA. May this storm pass. OM Shiva. Shiva love you, my Shanta. For ten long years he has been with me; he has greatly helped me in my search after Him who is the only living Reality. To-day I am nearer God — I stand at the threshold of realization. I seem to feel that it will not be long before the Veil will be lifted and I shall press my heart against the heart of the ultimate mystery — Who comes there? [*Listens attentively*]. They cannot have gone and come back so soon. Ha! another illusion! These days I am beset by endless illusions. Perhaps that betokens the end of my search, as the gloom is always thickest ere the dawn. Yea, after this will come the Light; I will see God! [*Hears a noise; listens attentively.*] Are they already returning? [*Calling.*] Shanta! [*He crosses and looks down. Thunder rolls very loudly now. He does not heed that. Suddenly he recoils in agitation. Footsteps are heard from below, rising higher and higher. Shukra rubs his eyes to make sure that he has really seen something that is not an illusion. He goes forward a few steps. The head of an old man rises into view, Shukra is stupefied; walks backwards until his back touches the Sacred plant. He stands still. The old man at last climbs the last step. He has not noticed Shukra. He looks at the Himalayas in the rear. Then his eyes travel over the monastery walls — Now suddenly they catch sight of Shukra.*]

SHUKRA. What seek ye here?

OLD MAN [*eyeing him carefully*]. Ah, Shukra! dost thou not recognize thine aged father? [*He goes to Shukra with outstretched arms.*]

SHUKRA. I have no father.

OLD MAN. But I am thy father. Did not my messenger come the other day? [*Silence.*] Did he lie to me? Dost thou not know thy mother is —

SHUKRA. Thy messenger came.

OLD MAN. Then come thou home at once. There is not time to be lost. Come, my son, ere thy mother leaves this earth.

SHUKRA. I cannot go.

OLD MAN. Thou canst not go? Dost thou not know that thy mother is on her death-bed?

SHUKRA. I have renounced the world. For twelve years I have had no father, nor mother.

OLD MAN. Thou didst leave us, but we did not renounce thee. And now thou shouldst come.

SHUKRA. I told thy messenger that I have no father nor mother,— I cannot come.

OLD MAN. I heard it all. If you art born of us, thou canst not have a heart of stone? Come, my son: I, thy father, implore thee.

SHUKRA. Nay, nay; God alone is my father.

OLD MAN. Hath it not been said in the scriptures that thy parents are thy God? Thy father should be obeyed.

SHUKRA. That was said by one who had not seen the Truth, the Light.

OLD MAN. I command thee in the name of the Scriptures.

SHUKRA. God alone can command me.

OLD MAN. Vishnu protect me! Art thou dreaming, my child? Yonder lies thy mother, fighting death,—

SHUKRA. I have heard it all.

OLD MAN. And yet thou wilt not go?

SHUKRA. Nay, father, I cannot go. The day I took the vow of a monk, that day I cut the bond that binds me to you all. I must be free of all ties. I must love none for myself that I may love all for God. Here I must remain where God has placed me, until He calls me elsewhere.

OLD MAN. But thy mother lies, fighting with each breath. She wishes to see thee.

SHUKRA. I cannot come.

OLD MAN. But thou must.

SHUKRA. I would if I could; but my life is in the hands of God.

OLD MAN [*mocking*]. God! Thy life belongs to God? Who gave thee life? Not God, but she who lies there dying; what ingratitude! This, indeed, is the age of darkness; sons are turning against their fathers,— and killing their own mother.

SHUKRA [*quietly*]. I may not love one more than another; my steps, as my heart, go whither God guides them.

OLD MAN [*mocking*]. Truth is thy witness?

SHUKRA. May Indra himself punish me if I love one more than another. Hear me, Indra. [*The roll of thunder above.*]

OLD MAN [*in desperation*]. Come, my son, in the name of thine own God I pray to thee, come to thy mother. I kneel at thy feet and beg for this boon. [*He does so.*]

SHUKRA [*raising him to his feet. He puts his own head down on the old man's feet.*].

OLD MAN. Then thou comest? [*Shukra rises to his feet.*]

SHUKRA [*hesitating*]. There is a law in the Sacred books that says an ascetic should see the place of his birth every twelfth year.

OLD MAN. And it is twelve years now since thou didst renounce us! Ah! blessed be the law.

SHUKRA. Yet, father, if I go, I go not in obedience to the law, but since the desire to see my mother is uppermost in me, I who dreamt not of the law hitherto — yea, now I hasten to abide by the law. Ah, what mockery! It is not the letter of the law, but the spirit in us that judges us sinners or saints. Now if I go with thee to obey the law, that would be betraying the law.

OLD MAN. Betraying the law!

SHUKRA. Thought alone is the measure of our innocence. He who thinks evil is a doer of evil indeed. Nay, nay, tempt me not with the law. I must remain here. I must keep my vow. [*He looks up to heaven; it is covered with enormous black clouds.*]

OLD MAN. The law is not written in the heavens. It is inscribed in the heart of man. Obey the dictates of thy heart.

SHUKRA. God alone shall be obeyed. I cannot betray His command. I, who am an ascetic, must not yield to the desire to see my mother — Nay! God —

OLD MAN. What manner of God is He that deprives a dying mother of her son? Such a God never was known in Hindu life. No such God lives, nor breathes. [*Thunder and lightning.*]

SHUKRA. Erring Soul, do not blaspheme your creator. He is the God of Truth — God of Love.

OLD MAN [*disdainfully*]. God of Love,— How can He be God of Love if He dries up the stream of thy heart and blinds thy reason as the clouds blind the eyes of the Sun? Nay, thou liest. It is not the God of Love, but the God of thine insane self — self-love that makes thee rob thy mother of her only joy in life. I — yea, I will answer to God for thee. If, by coming to see thy mother, thou sinnest, I ask God to make me pay for thy sin. Come, obey thy father,— I will take the burden of thy sin, if sin it be.

SHUKRA. Nay, each man pays for his sins as each man reaps the harvest of his own good deeds. None can atone for another. Ah, God! cursed be the hour when I was born. Cursed,—

OLD MAN [*angrily*]. Thou cursest thy birth?

SHUKRA. Yea, to be born in this world of woe is a curse indeed.

OLD MAN. Then curse thy tormented mind and thy desolate heart; curse not,—

SHUKRA. Nay, I curse the hour that saw me come to this earth of delusion and Maya. I do curse,—

OLD MAN. Thou dost dare curse the hour when thou wert born! Ah, vile sinner! To curse the hour of thy birth when thy mother is dying! God be my witness, he has incurred his father's wrath. Now,— no God can save thee.

SHUKRA. Nay, nay,—

OLD MAN. Shukra. I, thy father, thy God in life, curse thee. Thou hast deprived thy mother of her child, and her death of its solace. Thou hast incurred the wrath of the Spirits of all thy departed ancestors.

SHUKRA [*cries out*]. Not thus; not thus. [*Thunder and lightning, the whole sky is swept by the clouds.*]

OLD MAN. Not thus? Thus alone shall it be. Cursed be thou at night; cursed be thou by day; cursed be thou going; cursed be thou coming. Thou art

cursed by the spirit of the race, by the spirit of God. [*Continued thunder and lightning.*]

SHUKRA [*falling at his father's feet*]. I beseech thee, my father,—

OLD MAN [*shrinking away*]. Touch me not. [*Going left.*] Cursed art thou in Life and Death forever.

SHUKRA. God! — Father, go not thus.

OLD MAN. I am not thy father. [*Deafening and blinding thunder and lightning.*]

SHUKRA. Father —

OLD MAN [*going down the steps*]. Pollute not my hearing by calling me thy father. May the judgment of Indra be upon thee! [*He totters down out of sight, left, in anger and horror.*]

SHUKRA. Father, hear, oh hear! [*The rain comes down in a deluge; thunder and lightning. The rain blots everything out of sight. It pours in deep, dark sheets, through which the chains and sheets of lightning burn and run. After raining awhile, the sky clears. In the pale moonlight, Shukra is seen crouching near the Sacred plant. He is wet and disheveled. He slowly rises, swaying in exhaustion. Voices are heard below.*]

SHUKRA. Can it be that it is over? Has Indra judged me and found me free of error? Yea, were I in error, the lightning would have struck me. I lay there blinded by rain awaiting my death. It did not come. Yea, Indra has judged! [*Noises below; he does not hear.*] O, thou shadowy world, I am free of thee at last. Free of love and loving, free of all bondage. I have no earthly ties,— I lean on God alone. At last, I am bound to no earthly being, not even —[*strange pause*]— not even,— Shanta. [*He becomes conscious of the noise of approaching footsteps and the light of the torches from below.*] Who is that? [*He goes forward a few steps. Enter Kanada, torch in hand.*]

KANADA. Master, Master.

SHUKRA. Kanada, thou,—[*a pause, very brief but poignant*]. Why this agitation? Shanta, where is Shanta?

KANADA. Shanta is —

SHUKRA [*seeing the other torches rising suddenly*]. Speak! Who comes hither?

KANADA. They bring a dead man.

SHUKRA. Who is he? [*As a premonition of the truth comes over him.*] Where is Shanta?

KANADA [*blurts out*]. At the foot of the hill the lightning struck him.

SHUKRA [*with a terrible cry*]. Shanta,— my Shanta! [*Two men carrying torches with one hand, and dragging something white with the other, come up the steps. This vision silences Shukra. A pause follows. Another torch is seen rising behind them.*]

SHUKRA [*slowly*]. Shanta,— gone. [*Pause again, looking into the starry heavens.*] *This* is the Judgment of Indra!

[*Curtain.*]

THE WORKHOUSE WARD

A Play

By Lady Gregory

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PERSONS

MICHAEL MISKELL } [*Paupers*].
MIKE MCINERNEY }
MRS. DONOHOE [*a Countrywoman*].

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THE WORKHOUSE WARD

A Play

By Lady Gregory

[Scene: *A ward in Cloon Workhouse. The two old men in their beds.*]

Michael Miskell. Isn't it a hard case, Mike McInerney, myself and yourself to be left here in the bed, and it the feast day of Saint Colman, and the rest of the ward attending on the Mass.

Mike McInerney. Is it sitting up by the hearth you are wishful to be, Michael Miskell, with cold in the shoulders and with speckled shins? Let you rise up so, and you well able to do it, not like myself that has pains the same as tin-tacks within in my inside.

Michael Miskell. If you have pains within in your inside there is no one can see it or know of it the way they can see my own knees that are swelled up with the rheumatism, and my hands that are twisted in ridges the same as an old cabbage stalk. It is easy to be talking about soreness and about pains, and they maybe not to be in it at all.

Mike McInerney. To open me and to analyze me you would know what sort of a pain and a soreness I have in my heart and in my chest. But I'm not one like yourself to be cursing and praying and tormenting the time the nuns are at hand, thinking to get a bigger share than myself of the nourishment and of the milk.

Michael Miskell. That's the way you do be picking at me and faulting me. I had a share and a good share in my early time, and it's well you know that, and the both of us reared in Skehanagh.

Mike McInerney. You may say that, indeed, we are both of us reared in Skehanagh. Little wonder you to have good nourishment the time we were both rising, and you bringing away my rabbits out of the snare.

Michael Miskell. And you didn't bring away my own eels, I suppose, I was after spearing in the Turlough? Selling them to the nuns in the convent you did, and letting on they to be your own. For you were always a cheater and a schemer, grabbing every earthly thing for your own profit.

Mike McInerney. And you were no grabber yourself, I suppose, till your land and all you had grabbed wore away from you!

Michael Miskell. If I lost it itself, it was through the crosses I met with and I going through the world. I never was a rambler and a card-player like yourself, Mike McInerney, that ran through all and lavished it unknown to your mother!

Mike McInerney. Lavished it, is it? And if I did was it you yourself led me to lavish it or some other one? It is on my own floor I would be to-day and in the face of my family, but for the misfortune I had to be put with a bad next door neighbor that was yourself. What way did my means go from me is it? Spending on fencing, spending on walls, making up gates, putting up doors, that would keep your hens and your ducks from coming in through starvation on my floor, and every four footed beast you had from preying and trespassing on my oats and my mangolds and my little lock of hay!

Michael Miskell. O to listen to you! And I striving to please you and to be kind to you and to close my ears to the abuse you would be calling and letting out of your mouth. To trespass on your crops is it? It's little temptation there was for my poor beasts to ask to cross the mering. My God Almighty! What had you but a little corner of a field!

Mike McInerney. And what do you say to my garden that your two pigs had

destroyed on me the year of the big tree being knocked, and they making gaps in the wall.

MICHAEL MISKELL. Ah, there does be a great deal of gaps knocked in a twelvemonth. Why wouldn't they be knocked by the thunder, the same as the tree, or some storm that came up from the west?

MIKE MCINERNEY. It was the west wind, I suppose, that devoured my green cabbage? And that rooted up my Champion potatoes? And that ate the gooseberries themselves from off the bush?

MICHAEL MISKELL. What are you saying? The two quietest pigs ever I had, no way wicked and well ringed. They were not ten minutes in it. It would be hard for them to eat strawberries in that time, let alone gooseberries that's full of thorns.

MIKE MCINERNEY. They were not quiet, but very ravenous pigs you had that time, as active as a fox they were, killing my young ducks. Once they had blood tasted you couldn't stop them.

MICHAEL MISKELL. And what happened myself the fair day of Esserkelly, the time I was passing your door? Two brazened dogs that rushed out and took a piece of me. I never was the better of it or of the start I got, but wasting from then till now!

MIKE MCINERNEY. Thinking you were a wild beast they did, that had made his escape out of the traveling show, with the red eyes of you and the ugly face of you, and the two crooked legs of you that wouldn't hardly stop a pig in a gap. Sure any dog that had any life in it at all would be roused and stirred seeing the like of you going the road!

MICHAEL MISKELL. I did well taking out a summons against you that time. It is a great wonder you not to have been bound over through your lifetime, but the laws of England is queer.

MIKE MCINERNEY. What ailed me that I did not summons yourself after you stealing away the clutch of eggs I had in the barrel, and I away in Ardrahan searching out a clocking hen.

MICHAEL MISKELL. To steal your eggs is it? Is that what you are saying now? [*Holds up his hands.*] The Lord is in heaven, and Peter and the saints, and yourself that was in Ardrahan that day put a hand on them as soon as myself! Isn't it a bad story for me to be wearing out my days beside you the same as a spancelled goat. Chained I am and tethered I am to a man that is ramshacking his mind for lies!

MIKE MCINERNEY. If it is a bad story for you, Michael Miskell, it is a worse story again for myself. A Miskell to be next and near me through the whole of the four quarters of the year. I never heard there to be any great name on the Miskells as there was on my own race and name.

MICHAEL MISKELL. You didn't, is it? Well, you could hear it if you had but ears to hear it. Go across to Lisheen Crannagh and down to the sea and to Newtown Lynch and the mills of Duras and you'll find a Miskell, and as far as Dublin!

MIKE MCINERNEY. What signifies Crannagh and the mills of Duras? Look at all my own generations that are buried at the Seven Churches. And how many generations of the Miskells are buried in it? Answer me that!

MICHAEL MISKELL. I tell you but for the wheat that was to be sowed there would be more side cars and more common cars at my father's funeral (God rest his soul!) than at any funeral ever left your own door. And as to my mother, she was a Cuffe from Claregalway, and it's she had the purer blood!

MIKE MCINERNEY. And what do you say to the banshee? Isn't she apt to have knowledge of the ancient race? Was ever she heard to screech or to cry for the Miskells? Or for the Cuffes from Claregalway? She was not, but for the six families, the Hyneses, the Foxes, the Faheys, the Dooleys, the McInerneys. It is of the nature of the McInerneys she is I am thinking, crying them the same as a king's children.

MICHAEL MISKELL. It is a pity the banshee not to be crying for yourself at this minute, and giving you a warning to quit your lies and your chat and your arguing and your contrary ways; for there is no one under the rising sun could stand you. I tell you you are not behaving as in the presence of the Lord.

MIKE MCINERNEY. Is it wishful for my death you are? Let it come and meet me now and welcome so long as it will part me from yourself! And I say, and

I would kiss the book on it, I to have one request only to be granted, and I leaving it in my will, it is what I would request, nine furrows of the field, nine ridges of the hills, nine waves of the ocean to be put between your grave and my own grave the time we will be laid in the ground!

MICHAEL MISKELL. Amen to that! Nine ridges, is it? No, but let the whole ridge of the world separate us till the Day of Judgment! I would not be laid anear you at the Seven Churches, I to get Ireland without a divide!

MIKE MCINERNEY. And after that again! I'd sooner than ten pound in my hand, I to know that my shadow and my ghost will not be knocking about with your shadow and your ghost, and the both of us waiting our time. I'd sooner be delayed in Purgatory! Now, have you anything to say?

MICHAEL MISKELL. I have everything to say, if I had but the time to say it!

MIKE MCINERNEY. [*Sitting up.*] Let me up out of this till I'll choke you!

MICHAEL MISKELL. You scolding pauper you!

MIKE MCINERNEY. [*Shaking his fist at him.*] Wait a while!

MICHAEL MISKELL. [*Shaking his fist.*] Wait a while yourself!

[*Mrs. Donohoe comes in with a parcel. She is a countrywoman with a frilled cap and a shawl. She stands still a minute. The two old men lie down and compose themselves.*]

MRS. DONOHOE. They bade me come up here by the stair. I never was in this place at all. I don't know am I right. Which now of the two of ye is Mike McInerney?

MIKE MCINERNEY. Who is it is calling me by my name?

MRS. DONOHOE. Sure amn't I your sister, Honor McInerney that was, that is now Honor Donohoe.

MIKE MCINERNEY. So you are, I believe. I didn't know you till you pushed anear me. It is time indeed for you to come see me, and I in this place five year or more. Thinking me to be no credit to you, I suppose, among that tribe of the Donohoes. I wonder they to give you leave to come ask am I living yet or dead?

MRS. DONOHOE. Ah, sure, I buried the whole string of them. Himself was the last to go. [*Wipes her eyes.*] The Lord be praised he got a fine natural death. Sure we must go through our crosses. And he got a lovely funeral; it would delight you to hear the priest reading the Mass. My poor John Donohoe! A nice clean man, you couldn't but be fond of him. Very severe on the tobacco he was, but he wouldn't touch the drink.

MIKE MCINERNEY. And is it in Curranroe you are living yet?

MRS. DONOHOE. It is so. He left all to myself. But it is a lonesome thing the head of a house to have died!

MIKE MCINERNEY. I hope that he has left you a nice way of living?

MRS. DONOHOE. Fair enough, fair enough. A wide lovely house I have; a few acres of grass land . . . the grass does be very sweet that grows among the stones. And as to the sea, there is something from it every day of the year, a handful of periwinkles to make kitchen, or cockles maybe. There is many a thing in the sea is not decent, but cockles is fit to put before the Lord!

MIKE MCINERNEY. You have all that! And you without e'er a man in the house?

MRS. DONOHOE. It is what I am thinking, yourself might come and keep me company. It is no credit to me a brother of my own to be in this place at all.

MIKE MCINERNEY. I'll go with you! Let me out of this! It is the name of the McInerneys will be rising on every side!

MRS. DONOHOE. I don't know. I was ignorant of you being kept to the bed.

MIKE MCINERNEY. I am not kept to it, but maybe an odd time when there is a colic rises up within me. My stomach always gets better the time there is a change in the moon. I'd like well to draw anear you. My heavy blessing on you, Honor Donohoe, for the hand you have held out to me this day.

MRS. DONOHOE. Sure you could be keeping the fire in, and stirring the pot with the bit of Indian meal for the hens, and milking the goat and taking the tacklings off the donkey at the door; and maybe putting out the cabbage plants in their time. For when the old man died the garden died.

MIKE MCINERNEY. I could to be sure,

and be cutting the potatoes for seed. What luck could there be in a place and a man not to be in it? Is that now a suit of clothes you have brought with you?

MRS. DONOHOE. It is so, the way you will be tasty coming in among the neighbors at Curranroe.

MIKE MCINERNEY. My joy you are! It is well you earned me! Let me up out of this! [*He sits up and spreads out the clothes and tries on coat.*] That now is a good frieze coat . . . and a hat in the fashion . . . [*He puts on hat.*]

MICHAEL MISKELL [*alarmed*]. And is it going out of this you are, Mike McInerney?

MIKE MCINERNEY. Don't you hear I am going? To Curranroe I am going. Going I am to a place where I will get every good thing!

MICHAEL MISKELL. And is it to leave me here after you you will?

MIKE MCINERNEY [*in a rising chant*]. Every good thing! The goat and the kid are there, the sheep and the lamb are there, the cow does be running and she coming to be milked! Plowing and seed sowing, blossom at Christmas time, the cuckoo speaking through the dark days of the year! Ah, what are you talking about? Wheat high in hedges, no talk about the rent! Salmon in the rivers as plenty as hurf! Spending and getting and nothing scarce! Sport and pleasure, and music on the strings! Age will go from me and I will be young again. Geese and turkeys for the hundreds and drink for the whole world!

MICHAEL MISKELL. Ah, Mike, is it truth you are saying, you to go from me and to leave me with rude people and with townspeople, and with people of every parish in the union, and they having no respect for me or no wish for me at all!

MIKE MCINERNEY. Whist now and I'll leave you . . . my pipe [*hands it over*]; and I'll engage it is Honor Donohoe won't refuse to be sending you a few ounces of tobacco an odd time, and neighbors coming to the fair in November or in the month of May.

MICHAEL MISKELL. Ah, what signifies tobacco? All that I am craving is the talk. There to be no one at all to say out to whatever thought might be rising in my innate mind! To be lying here and no conversible person in it would be the abomination of misery!

MIKE MCINERNEY. Look now, Honor. . . . It is what I often heard said, two to be better than one. . . . Sure if you had an old trouser was full of holes. . . . or a skirt. . . wouldn't you put another in under it that might be as tattered as itself, and the two of them together would make some sort of a decent show?

MRS. DONOHOE. Ah, what are you saying? There is no holes in that suit I brought you now, but as sound it is as the day I spun it for himself.

MIKE MCINERNEY. It is what I am thinking, Honor . . . I do be weak an odd time . . . Any load I would carry, it preys upon my side . . . and this man does be weak an odd time with the swelling in his knees . . . but the two of us together it's not likely it is at the one time we would fail. Bring the both of us with you, Honor, and the height of the castle of luck on you, and the both of us together will make one good hardy man!

MRS. DONOHOE. I'd like my job! Is it queer in the head you are grown asking me to bring in a stranger off the road?

MICHAEL MISKELL. I am not, ma'am, but an old neighbor I am. If I had forecasted this asking I would have asked it myself. Michael Miskell I am, that was in the next house to you in Skehanagh!

MRS. DONOHOE. For pity's sake! Michael Miskell is it? That's worse again. Yourself and Mike that never left fighting and scolding and attacking one another! Sparring at one another like two young pups you were, and threatening one another after like two grown dogs!

MIKE MCINERNEY. All the quarreling was ever in the place it was myself did it. Sure his anger rises fast and goes away like the wind. Bring him out with myself now, Honor Donohoe, and God bless you.

MRS. DONOHOE. Well, then, I will not bring him out, and I will not bring yourself out, and you not to learn better sense. Are you making yourself ready to come?

MIKE MCINERNEY. I am thinking, maybe . . . it is a mean thing for a man that is shivering into seventy years to go changing from place to place.

MRS. DONOHOE. Well, take your luck or leave it. All I asked was to save you

from the hurt and the harm of the year.

MIKE MCINERNEY. Bring the both of us with you or I will not stir out of this.

MRS. DONOHOE. Give me back my fine suit so [*begins gathering up the clothes*], till I go look for a man of my own!

MIKE MCINERNEY. Let you go so, as you are so unnatural and so disobliging, and look for some man of your own, God help him! For I will not go with you at all!

MRS. DONOHOE. It is too much time I lost with you, and dark night waiting to overtake me on the road. Let the two of you stop together, and the back of my hand to you. It is I will leave you there the same as God left the Jews!

[*She goes out. The old men lie down and are silent for a moment.*]

MICHAEL MISKELL. Maybe the house is not so wide as what she says.

MIKE MCINERNEY. Why wouldn't it be wide?

MICHAEL MISKELL. Ah, there does be a good deal of middling poor houses down by the sea.

MIKE MCINERNEY. What would you know about wide houses? Whatever sort of a house you had yourself it was too wide for the provision you had into it.

MICHAEL MISKELL. Whatever provision I had in my house it was wholesome provision and natural provision. Herself and her periwinkles! Periwinkles is a hungry sort of food.

MIKE MCINERNEY. Stop your impudence and your chat or it will be the worse for you. I'd bear with my own father and mother as long as any man would, but if they'd vex me I would give them the length of a rope as soon as another!

MICHAEL MISKELL. I would never ask at all to go eating periwinkles.

MIKE MCINERNEY [*sitting up*]. Have you any one to fight me?

MICHAEL MISKELL [*whimpering*]. I have not, only the Lord!

MIKE MCINERNEY. Let you leave putting insults on me so, and death picking at you!

MICHAEL MISKELL. Sure I am saying nothing at all to displease you. It is why I wouldn't go eating periwinkles, I'm in dread I might swallow the pin.

MIKE MCINERNEY. Who in the world wide is asking you to eat them? You're as tricky as a fish in the full tide!

MICHAEL MISKELL. Tricky is it! Oh, my curse and the curse of the four and twenty men upon you!

MIKE MCINERNEY. That the worm may chew you from skin to marrow bone! [*Seizes his pillow.*]

MICHAEL MISKELL [*seizing his own pillow*]. I'll leave my death on you, you scheming vagabone!

MIKE MCINERNEY. By cripes! I'll pull out your pin feathers! [*throwing pillow*].

MICHAEL MISKELL [*throwing pillow*]. You tyrant! You big bully you!

MIKE MCINERNEY [*throwing pillow and seizing mug*]. Take this so, you stobbing ruffian you!

[*They throw all within their reach at one another, mugs, prayer books, pipes, etc.*]

[*Curtain.*]

LOUISE

A Play

By J. H. Speenhoff

Translated from the Dutch by A. V. C. P. Huizinga and Pierre Loving.

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PERSONS

Louise.
Van der Elst [*Notary*].
Vennema [*Louise's Father*].
Sophie [*Serving Maid*].

Applications for permissions to produce Louise must be addressed to Pierre Loving, 240 W. 4.

LOUISE

A Play

By J. H. Speenhoff

[Scene: *A large fashionably appointed room with few decorations on the walls. The latter are papered in yellow with large black lilies. To the right, a tall broad window with heavy brown curtains. To the left, an old gold harp with a little footstool. Behind, to the right, a door with brown portières, affording a view of a vestibule and banister. To the left, down front, a broad couch with black head cushions. Next to it the end of a heavy broad oaken table, with the side turned toward the couch. Behind, the back wall has an open chimney with carved wood and ornaments on it. Beside the chimney, on both sides, are two large comfortable chairs and two others by the table and window respectively. On the table are the remains of breakfast: fruit glasses and two empty champagne bottles.*

As the curtain rises Louise is discovered lying on the couch with her feet extended toward the audience. She lies quietly and gazes blankly in the distance. Closer scrutiny reveals that she is in the last stage of intoxication. On the whole, it is rather a lady-like inebriety and expresses itself now and again by way of a heavy sigh, looseness of limb, a languid flutter of the eyelids and a disposition to be humorous. It is about three in the afternoon. As for the tone of the room, there are a lot of yellows, blacks and browns; the light is quite subdued. Soon after the rise of the curtain, Louise begins slowly and dreamily to hum a melody. She stops for a while, gazes blankly around and starts humming again. Then she raises herself, crosses her arms on the tables and rests her head on them. Her hair is loosely arranged — or disarranged. Her dressing gown is black and white.

A bell is rung downstairs. Louise does not seem to hear it. Another ting-a-ling. You can hear the maid going downstairs. The door opens and shuts. Two pairs of feet are heard climbing the stairs. The maid parts the portières, shows Van der Elst in and points Louise out to him, meanwhile remaining discreetly behind the portières.

The truth is that Sophie is very much embarrassed. She looks as if she has been called away from her proper duties. She is a healthy maid, with tousled blond hair, cotton dress, blue apron, maid's cap and is in her stocking feet. She goes toward Louise, then stops confusedly at a little distance from her. She moves a chair needlessly, in timid embarrassment, and wipes her lips with her apron.]

Sophie. Here's a gentleman to see you — to see — you, madam.

[*Louise doesn't hear.*]

Sophie [*approaches the end of table*]. A gentleman has come — come to see — you.

Louise [*raising herself on her elbows; with her head on her hands*]. What are you doing?

Sophie [*confusedly*]. I — madam? Why, nothing. But there's a gentleman . . . you see . . .

Louise. A gentleman? Very well, you may go. [*She closes her eyes.*]

Sophie. But . . . but . . . he wishes to speak to you. A gray-haired gentleman. He is standing by the portières . . . over there. [*Indicates Van Elst.*]

[*Louise does not pay any attention to Sophie or Van Elst, but composes herself for another nap on the couch.*]

Sophie. May he come in? [*A long pause.*] May he. . . .? [*Louise does not answer. Sophie waits a bit, then she beckons Van Elst into the room.*] She won't answer, sir. Maybe you'd better come back in an hour or so. . . .

VAN ELST. Hm! No. That's impossible. [*Looks at Louise.*] What's the matter with madam? Is she asleep?

SOPHIE. No . . . you see . . . she is, you know. . . .

VAN ELST [*approaching*]. What?

SOPHIE. She isn't well. . . .

VAN ELST. Ah not well?

SOPHIE. Yes, from. . . . [*Hesitates.*]

VAN ELST [*spying the bottles on the table*]. Has madam consumed those?

SOPHIE. Yes, yes. It's awful. [*Pause.*]

VAN ELST. Does this happen very often?

SOPHIE. Yes. Oh, yes, quite often.

VAN ELST. Indeed!

SOPHIE. Hadn't you better go until . . . for a while?

VAN ELST. No, no. I shall. . . .

SOPHIE. Very well, sir, you know best. [*Sophie goes out of the room on tiptoe.*]

[*Now that Sophie is out of the room, one has an opportunity to scrutinize Van Elst more closely. He is a prosperous-looking country gentleman about fifty years old. He wears a shining tophat, white vest with a gold chain across his stomach, tight-fitting blue trousers, low shoes, white socks and a short blue coat. He is clean-shaven and when he removes his hat, one observes that his hair is close-cropped. His walking-stick, contrary to expectations, is light and slim. He takes a chair near the window, directly behind the harp, puts his hat, cane and gloves beside him on the floor and looks around. He glances at Louise, shakes his head solemnly, coughs, wipes his forehead, puts his handkerchief carefully away, coughs again, moves his chair and after some signs of nervousness, says*]:

VAN ELST. Miss . . . may I have a word with you? [*Louise doesn't hear.*]

VAN ELST [*with growing embarrassment*]. I . . . I should like to speak to you.

LOUISE [*a little wildly*]. Are you there?

VAN ELST [*taken aback*]. Yes . . . no . . . yes . . . I. . . . Whom do you mean?

LOUISE. Come here beside me.

VAN ELST [*astonished*]. Certainly, but . . .

LOUISE [*sighing*]. Come . . . come.

VAN ELST. Aren't you making a mistake? I'm not . . .

LOUISE [*raising herself halfway, left elbow on table, head on hand, the other arm outstretched on the table. She looks unseeingly at him*]. Don't you want to?

VAN ELST. But I'm not . . . how shall I put it? I've come to speak with you very seriously.

LOUISE [*has seated herself in the middle of the couch. She extends her arms with a smiling invitation*]. Don't you dare?

VAN ELST [*very considerably embarrassed by this time. He coughs and mops his face*]. It isn't quite necessary. We can talk this way.

LOUISE [*smiling*]. I will come to you, you know. Ah, you don't realize . . .

VAN ELST [*rising, disturbed*]. No. Please stay where you are. Don't trouble yourself. I can hear you from where you are, and you can hear me.

LOUISE [*ignores his words completely, gets up dizzily and gropes with the aid of the table toward the chair. She leans on the arm of the chair and looks at Van Elst. She points out the small chair*]. Come here.

VAN ELST [*after some deliberation, sits at her side*]. We had better . . . [*His voice dies in a mutter.*]

LOUISE [*insistent*]. No. Here at my side. Sit close to me, then I'll be able to hear you better.

VAN ELST [*pulling his chair closer*]. I don't see why . . .

LOUISE. Don't you think I'm very beautiful and wise?

VAN ELST. I have very serious things to discuss with you. Will you listen to me? [*He assumes an important pose.*]

LOUISE. Why do you take on such a severe tone? You must be more gentle — very gentle.

VAN ELST. Hm! Very well. First let me tell you who I am. My name is Van der Elst. I'm the new attorney back home, and I am a friend of your father's.

LOUISE. Well?

VAN ELST. I think a lot of your father. As you know, Mr. Degudo was your father's lawyer; but he's gone away and I've taken his place.

LOUISE. Why am I honored with these confidences?

VAN ELST. You ought to know who I am.

LOUISE. Well, what's your name?

VAN ELST [*angrily*]. I told you that my name is Van der Elst, attorney-at-law.

LOUISE [*smiling vapidly*]. Have you any bonbons with you?

VAN ELST. What sort of a question is that, madam? You're not listening to me. [*He gets up angrily, about to collect his effects prior to leaving.*]

LOUISE. Are you leaving me so soon? If I were you, I wouldn't leave.

[*Van Elst walks back and forth in annoyance, muttering all the while.*]

LOUISE. What are you muttering about? Come here and sit by my side. Last week I received flowers from an old gentleman, an old gentleman. At least that is what the girl said. He sent them for my shoulders, mind you. You see, he had seen my shoulders. Please sit down. That's why he sent me flowers—[*extending her hand*] and this ring came with them. Look! [*Van der Elst has taken a seat. She thrusts her hand before his face.*] It's the thin one.

VAN ELST. Madam, I didn't come for this frivolity.

LOUISE. What would you give if you could kiss me?

[*Van Elst coughs and fumbles with his handkerchief.*]

LOUISE. Do you know what I suspect? I suspect that you are the old gentleman in question.

VAN ELST [*getting up in high dudgeon*]. Madam, I consider that accusation entirely improper, in view of the fact that I am a respectable married man. I want you to know that I keep out of these things. My reputation is above reproach. Do you intend to listen to me or not?

LOUISE. Don't shout so.

VAN ELST. Do you talk this way always? You amaze me.

LOUISE [*smiling*]. I suspect you are the gentleman with the pretty touch about my shoulders. Well, sit down. Is he gone? Are you gone?

VAN ELST [*stepping forwardly boldly*]. I am still here. This is positively the last time I'll ask you to listen to me. I assure you, my patience is nearly exhausted. Your father and mother, your family have asked me to bring the following to your notice. Your present conduct has caused a great scandal. You've left your family for a man who is too far above you socially ever to make you his wife. Consequently, you have become his mistress.

LOUISE. Eh?

VAN ELST. I'm not through yet. Your father and mother have requested me to ask you to come back home. They await you with open arms.

LOUISE. Don't be silly. Sit down.

VAN ELST. Oh, it's useless.

LOUISE [*incoherently*]. Will you promise to tell me?

VAN ELST. I suppose I'll have to wait. [*He sits down in utter despair.*]

LOUISE [*goes up to him unsteadily, groping for the arm of the chair. With a laugh*]. Tell me, which one was it. This shoulder or this one? Ah, aren't you clever! You're the old gentleman, aren't you, you old duck?

VAN ELST. A useless commission. Poor parents!

LOUISE. What's that? The joke's on me.

VAN ELST. Next she'll ask me to dance with her, I suppose.

LOUISE. Dance? No dancing. Don't get up. You needn't get up. I don't mean it . . . really, I don't.

[*Louise sits in front of the harp and runs her fingers idly over the strings. Then slowly, she plays the same melody she hummed previously. She hums it again dreamily. The music grows softer and softer. She sighs, stops playing, her head drops to her hands and she falls limply to the floor.*]

VAN ELST. Good God, what's this? It wasn't my fault. I suppose I was cruel to her. [*Walks excitedly back and forth. Sophie enters.*]

SOPHIE. What's the matter?

VAN ELST. Look at your mistress. I can't make out what's wrong with her.

SOPHIE. Oh, that's nothing. It happens every day. Just a fainting fit.

VAN ELST. What a life! What a life! Why don't you do something? She can't be allowed to lie there that way.

SOPHIE. Just a minute. [*She seizes*

Louise by the waist and lifts her from the floor. Van Elst assists her.]

SOPHIE. Nothing to worry about [*arranging Louise's clothes*]. Now you lie here and you'll be quite all right in a very short while. She gets that way quite frequently.

VAN ELST [*sinks into a chair*]. This is frightful.

SOPHIE [*confidentially*]. Madam drinks heavily in the afternoons and in the evening, too, when the master is here. Yes, and then they sing together and madam plays on that thing there. [*Points to the harp.*] It's very nice sometimes.

VAN ELST. Who is the master?

SOPHIE. I don't know, sir. But that's what I've been told to call him.

VAN ELST. Are they happy together? Or do they sometimes quarrel?

SOPHIE. I don't know. I don't think so, for he's very good and likes her very much.

VAN ELST. Madam never weeps or is sad? I ask these questions for madam's sake.

SOPHIE. Oh, yes, she weeps sometimes. But it's mostly when she hasn't had a drink and feels out of sorts. But it's soon cured when I fetch the wine.

VAN ELST. Then she occasionally thinks of her home. That may help us.

SOPHIE. May I suggest something, sir? [*She busies herself clearing off the table.*] If I were you, I should go away quietly.

VAN ELST. Go away?

SOPHIE. For madam can't bear men folks around her when she sobers up. If I were you, I'd go away.

VAN ELST. No, I'll stay. If she's sober after a while, perhaps she'll be able to talk to me coherently.

SOPHIE. You must know best. But I warn you, madam can't bear to have anybody else with her.

VAN ELST. What! Do you think I came for that purpose?

SOPHIE. Of course. You're not trying to tell me that you came to read the newspaper with her.

VAN ELST. You keep your mouth shut. I've come to ask madam to return to her parents.

SOPHIE. Oh, that's it, is it? You're from the family. I see. Of course . . . but she won't go with you.

LOUISE [*dreaming aloud*]. William, William! He's bolting. Help! Help! Oh, the brown mare! Look! [*Sighs.*]

SOPHIE. She's delirious again. She goes on like that a lot. She was in a carriage with the master the other day, when the horse bolted. That's what she always dreams about these days.

LOUISE. Ah, wait. I left my earrings at the doctor's. Mother, mother, I love you so. [*She sighs heavily. A ring is heard below.*]

VAN ELST. Ah, that's Mr. Vennema. Open the door for him. It's her father.

SOPHIE. Ought I let him in? He mustn't see her in that condition.

VAN ELST. Please open the door.

SOPHIE. Oh, all right. [*She goes out.*]

[*Van der Elst listens.*]

LOUISE. Hopla, hopla, hopla. . . .

[*Vennema and Sophie mount the stairs.*]

SOPHIE [*to Vennema behind the portières*]. Come this way, sir. You may come in.

[*Vennema comes in hesitating and stops at the door. He is a kindly country parson type, wholly gray, with a gray beard and mustache. He is wearing an ecclesiastical hat, a black coat and black trousers. He gazes about anxiously and finally his eyes light on Van der Elst. Van der Elst beckons to Vennema and indicates Louise on the couch. Sophie goes out.*]

VAN ELST. There she is.

VENNEMA. Is she ill?

VAN ELST. No, that isn't it. She's dreaming. She's very nervous. She was quite agitated a moment ago.

VENNEMA. What did she say?

VAN ELST. She wouldn't listen to me. She insisted on speaking of other things. As a matter of fact, she acted very queerly.

LOUISE. First prize . . . splendid.

VENNEMA. What's the matter with her?

VAN ELST. I don't know. Nerves perhaps.

VENNEMA. Has she had a fainting spell?

VAN ELST. Don't worry about it. She'll be better in a little while.

VENNEMA [*noticing the bottles*]. Is she. . . .?

VAN ELST. I don't know.

VENNEMA. Couldn't you tell? You may tell me.

VAN ELST. Yes; I think a little.

VENNEMA. That hurts. I never thought she would allow herself to get into such a state. Has she been this way for a long time?

VAN ELST. About ten minutes, I should say. But she'll be quite all right in a little while.

VENNEMA. I can't help being distressed over it. That she should have descended to this!

VAN ELST. Do you know what the maid told me? She said that they are happy together, and that he is truly in love with her.

VENNEMA. Yes. But why did he allow her to go this far?

VAN ELST. She won't see anybody.

VENNEMA. Not even me? Her father?

VAN ELST. Perhaps you.

VENNEMA. What do you think? Will she come home with us? Have you found out?

VAN ELST. She didn't pay any attention to me. She didn't quite understand my mission. I don't know. Perhaps you had better speak to her.

LOUISE [*calling*]. I . . . Oh . . . Help! [*She sits up in the middle of the couch, with her hands to her face. She droops and seems to fall asleep in a sitting posture.*]

VENNEMA. Is she . . .?

VAN ELST. Yes, she's coming to.

LOUISE [*wakes with a start*]. Bah! [*She looks around, does not recognize Van der Elst and Vennema. Then, peering closer, she registers surprise, sudden fright and finally anger. Van der Elst is about to speak, but she interrupts him.*]

LOUISE. Who are you? [*Coughs.*] Who are you and what is your business here? Go away. . . . Go away.

VAN ELST. Madam . . . I . . .

VENNEMA. Let me speak. [*He goes toward Louise.*] Louise . . . it is I. Don't you recognize me? [*After a pause.*] Louise!

LOUISE [*after a pause*]. Father!

VENNEMA. Aren't you glad to see your father?

LOUISE [*in a low tone of voice*]. Oh, father.

VENNEMA. You are not ill, my child?

LOUISE. No. Why have you come?

VENNEMA. I wanted to speak to you.

LOUISE. Why did you come? Why?

VENNEMA [*seating himself beside Louise on the couch*]. Listen to me, my dear.

LOUISE. Yes.

VENNEMA. I came to find out whether you are happy or not.

LOUISE. I don't know. Happy . . . that's a strange word.

VENNEMA. Why strange? Are you happier here than — with us.

LOUISE [*leaning forward on her hands*]. Than with you? [*Looking up.*] I prefer to be here.

VENNEMA. Don't you miss us all, just the least little bit?

LOUISE. Sometimes, when I'm alone. All the same, I'd rather be here.

VENNEMA. Aren't you deluding yourself? Wasn't your life with us at home better?

LOUISE. Better? What do you mean, better?

VENNEMA. You know what I mean. Don't you regret running off with . . . him . . . and spreading sorrow in our hearts?

LOUISE. I loved him. And then I yearned for freedom, for the pleasures of life and travel. At home everything was so dull and monotonous. I couldn't stand the smug people at home. Their life is one round of lying and gossiping, of scolding and backbiting.

VENNEMA. But what of this sort of existence? You don't quite appreciate the damage you have done. How you have stained the fair reputation of your parents. I wonder whether that has ever occurred to you? You say that you do not like the people who are our neighbors back home, but it is these very people who make and unmake reputations. We must live with them. Can't you realize that?

LOUISE. Father, I'm sorry, but I couldn't go back to them. The commonplace tattlers with their humdrum, uneventful lives scarcely exist for me.

VENNEMA. They don't exist for you, you say. But, remember, that they despise you. They and their contempt do not reach you, but they reach us.

LOUISE [*almost inaudibly*]. Yes.

VENNEMA. But your future? Have you thought of that? What will it be? Wretchedness and contempt. When I came in and saw you stretched out in that condition, I . . .

LOUISE. Father, I want to forget. I don't want to think of the past.

VENNEMA. In order not to think of the past, you resort to drink?

LOUISE. Sometimes it is hard to forget.

VENNEMA. Tell me, Louise: does he love you, and do you love him? And even if this be true, will he continue to love you always? Won't the time come when he will grow indifferent to you?

LOUISE [*getting up*]. Never . . . never. Not he. You don't believe that such a thing is impossible? He cannot forget me. I have given him everything . . . my love, myself . . . all that is truly myself.

VENNEMA. Aren't you a little too optimistic?

LOUISE. Not when it concerns him. He knows what I have sacrificed. He knows what I have given him. There is no room for doubt, father.

VENNEMA. Very well, we will not speak of it again. But how about us, Louise? Don't you ever think of us? Don't you ever long to come back to us, to the old home where you were born? Wouldn't you like to see it again?

LOUISE [*sadly*]. Yes.

VENNEMA [*anxious and excited*]. Then come back with me. Come back to us. You know my motive for coming. Won't you come back home with me? Everything is in perfect readiness for you: your little room, the flowers, the trees . . . everything. Louise . . .

LOUISE. Father, that can never be. Never.

VENNEMA. Why not? We have arranged everything. Nothing will be lacking for your welcome, your comfort.

LOUISE. Why should I bring misfortune to you? It would simply add to your unhappiness. Isn't it better now that I am away from home? Later on, perhaps.

VENNEMA. Later on? Did it ever occur to you that there may be no later on? You may not find us then. We are getting old, your mother and I.

LOUISE. Don't, please!

VENNEMA. Come, Louise. Come. Think of the happiness.

LOUISE. How about the townfolks? Would they accept me again, do you think?

VENNEMA. Don't think of them. Those who are sincerely friendly to us, will continue to be so. The rest don't count. Ah, if we only could have you back, my child!

LOUISE [*after a pause*]. Father, I cannot go back. Don't you see that it is utterly impossible? I am changed now. And then I am not strong enough. Life is so long and I cannot bear to face it alone.

VENNEMA. But you will have us. You belong to us, and your place, if you have a place in the world, is with your mother and father. Your old home is waiting for you with welcoming arms. Summer is coming and you know how splendid the garden and the orchard are when the lilac trees are in bloom. Do you remember the little tree you planted once? Doesn't your heart yearn to see the little flowers that have sprouted on its branches? Everything is just waiting for you to come home.

LOUISE [*dreamily*]. Everything. . . .

VENNEMA. You will come, won't you?

LOUISE. I cannot. I simply cannot. It is your happiness that I am thinking of. The intrusion of my life would spoil everything. Everybody will blame you.

VENNEMA. My child, I have long ago put behind me what the world says.

LOUISE [*suddenly*]. And William? What about William? What about him when I go back? No, I can't do it. I cannot leave him.

VENNEMA. What about your mother, Louise? She is waiting for you. She will be at the window to-night, waiting and peering out. Your chair is ready for you and she herself will open the door to greet you, to take you to her heart again. Do you know, Louise, she has been getting very gray of late. Come.

LOUISE. Mother isn't ill?

VENNEMA. Your mother wants to see you before she . . .

LOUISE [*rising to her feet*]. I . . . I will do it.

VENNEMA. Thank you, my child. [*He embraces her*]. We shall go at once.

LOUISE. Ring for Sophie, please. Yes,

we will go at once. [*Close to him.*] Mother is not seriously ill?

VENNEMA. I am sure, your return will be her cure.

VAN ELST [*who has listened attentively throughout the whole conversation*]. Madam, permit me also to thank you for this resolve to return home. You are going to make many hearts joyful because of your decision.

LOUISE. I hope so.

SOPHIE [*enters*]. Is there anything you wish, madam?

LOUISE. Pack my traveling bag. Get my black hat and gray coat. I am leaving at once.

SOPHIE. Very well, madam, but . . .

LOUISE. Lose no time about it. I'm in a hurry.

SOPHIE. A lady called to see, madam, and I told her you were engaged.

LOUISE. What did she want? Did she say?

SOPHIE. She said she would come back. She insisted on speaking with you.

LOUISE. Do you know the lady?

SOPHIE. Yes. . . . no. That is, I don't know. I believe I've seen her before.

LOUISE. Didn't she say what her errand was?

SOPHIE. No, madam, but she said she would come back soon.

LOUISE. When she comes, show her into the drawing room.

SOPHIE. Yes, madam.

LOUISE. Have everything ready at once.

SOPHIE. Yes, madam. [*She goes out.*]

LOUISE. You will excuse me. I must change my clothes. I shall put my old ones on. You see, I kept them. Then I must write to him. I must tell him why I am going away. [*She goes out by the side door.*]

VENNEMA. I feel as if I have never been as happy as this before.

VAN ELST. It will help your wife to get well. She hasn't been very well these last few weeks.

VENNEMA. Yes, I know it will do her heaps of good. I am quite happy.

VAN ELST. Don't excite your wife unnecessarily to-night. Any shock may be too much for her.

VENNEMA. Yes, we will postpone our rejoicing until to-morrow. You must come to-morrow, but alone. Bring your wife Sunday evening. The process of acclamation will be slow, of course. There is a train about six, I believe.

VAN ELST. Yes, at five forty-five. We have an hour yet.

VENNEMA. The sooner the better. She must have a change at first. I thought it mightn't be a bad idea if we paid my brother a visit at Frezier. It might do her a lot of good. Yes, I think what she needs is a change of scene.

VAN ELST. If I were you I would stay home the first week.

VENNEMA. We'll attend to that later. It is terrible when you think of the condition she was in when we arrived.

VAN ELST. The maid said that it happened quite often, too.

VENNEMA. What do you think he will do when he learns that she is gone?

VAN ELST. If he is anything of a man, if he is a man of honor, then he will stay away. If not, there is the law. But I believe it can be arranged although she loves him very much.

VENNEMA. Let's not speak of it any more. She will change slowly, and so the past will be forgotten.

SOPHIE [*enters with a traveling bag*]. Oh, isn't Madam here?

VENNEMA. She will be back very shortly.

SOPHIE. Here's the bag. Everything is ready. [*Puts Louise's things on the table.*]

LOUISE [*enters very simply dressed with a letter in her hand*]. Here I am. [*To Sophie.*] Have you packed everything?

SOPHIE. Yes, everything is ready.

LOUISE. Help me then.

[*Sophie helps Louise with her coat.*]

LOUISE. Mail this letter for me. [*The bell rings downstairs.*] Go and see who it is. I am not at home to anybody now.

SOPHIE. It may be the lady who was here before.

LOUISE. Heavens, I had almost forgotten her. If it's the lady —

SOPHIE. Yes?

LOUISE. See who it is.

SOPHIE [*going*]. Yes, madam.

VENNEMA. What is it, Louise? What does the lady wish?

LOUISE. Nothing, father [*with a forced laugh*]. Nothing at all.

VENNEMA. Must you see her? Can't you say that you are about to go away

on a trip and that you cannot see her? Say that, and let us go.

LOUISE. Oh, it's nothing. I will just speak to her, and then we will go at once. [*She laughs again in a forced manner.*]

VENNEMA. But why are you so excited?

SOPHIE [*entering*]. Madam, the lady has gone away. She left this. [*She extends a visiting card.*] But —

LOUISE. What is it, Sophie?

SOPHIE. She told me to tell you that you must think of the bay mare. Here is her card.

LOUISE [*excitedly*]. Oh, a card [*tries to restrain herself*]. Give it to me.

SOPHIE. Then she said nothing about Elsa and the race.

[*Louise takes the card and goes a little to the side.*]

VENNEMA. What's the matter, Louise? What ails you?

LOUISE [*deeply affected*]. Father, father! [*She looks from the card to her father with tears in her eyes; then she goes mutely toward the couch, sits down, and stares blankly in front of her.*]

LOUISE [*sobbing*]. I can't do it!

VENNEMA [*takes the visiting card from her hands*]. Must you pay all that? Have you lost all that money?

LOUISE. Yes.

VENNEMA. Through gambling?

LOUISE. Yes.

VENNEMA. Good God! Gambling, too? And to-night you must pay all that money.

SOPHIE [*entering excitedly with a small bunch of flowers*]. Madam, Madam.

LOUISE [*looks up slowly and sees the flowers*]. What is it?

SOPHIE. These are the compliments of Mr. De Brandeis.

LOUISE. Mr. De Brandeis?

SOPHIE. The gentleman is waiting below in a carriage.

VENNEMA. Tell that gentleman to go away.

LOUISE. It was too beautiful, too good to be true. Now it will never be.

VENNEMA. Why not? I shall give you the money.

LOUISE. Father, I tell you it can never be.

VENNEMA. What do you mean? What are you going to do, Louise?

LOUISE. Father, I can't go back home with you. [*To Sophie.*] Take the flowers and tell Mr. De Brandeis that — that —

[*Vennema sinks into a chair. Sophie stands at the door with the flowers. Van der Elst stands listening anxiously.*]

LOUISE [*with a sob in her throat*]. Tell him, that I am going to stand by him.

[*She stands looking at the door, twitching her handkerchief nervously.*]

[*Curtain.*]

THE GRANDMOTHER

A Play

By Lajos Biro

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CHARACTERS

THE GRANDMOTHER.
HER GRANDCHILDREN:
- THE BLOND YOUNG LADY.
- THE BRUNETTE YOUNG LADY.
- THE BRIDE.
- THE VIVACIOUS GIRL.
- THE MELANCHOLY GIRL.
- THE SENTIMENTAL HIGH SCHOOL GIRL.
- THE JOVIAL YOUNG MAN.
- THE POLITE YOUNG MAN.
- THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN.

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THE GRANDMOTHER

A Play

By Lajos Biro

[*There is only this notable thing to be said about Grandmother — her hair is snow white, her cheeks rosy and her eyes violet blue. She is the most youthful and enthusiastic, best and most cordial grandmother ever beloved by her grandchildren.*

The scene opens on a broad, sunny terrace furnished with garden furniture, chairs, small tables and chaises longues. Back of the terrace is the beautiful summer residence of Grandpa. Behind it is a large English garden in its lenten blossoms. The Disagreeable Young Man enters; yawns; stretches discontentedly; slouches here and there; picks up a volume from the table, then falls into a couch at right and, lighting a cigarette, begins to read. The other grandchildren enter in groups of two and three and seat themselves.]

The Jovial Young Man. My word, children, I am too full for utterance. What a spread! Now for a good cigar and a soft chair and I am as rich as a king.

The Blond Young Lady. We are having such charming weather. Is not this park like a paradise?

The Brunette Young Lady. How did you like the after-dinner speeches?

The Vivacious Girl. Uncle Heinrich was splendid. [*There is great laughter.*]

The Polite Young Man. Uncle Heinrich was never strong in speechmaking, but in the beginning even Demosthenes stuttered.

The Jovial Young Man. The trouble is that Uncle Heinrich stopped where Demosthenes began. Besides a manufacturer has no time to parade on the sea shore with pebbles under his tongue.

[*There is more laughter.*]

The Polite Young Man. Children, who wants a cigarette?

The Blond and Brunette Young Ladies. I!

The Polite Young Man [*handing them cigarettes and lighting a match for them. He speaks to the Bride*]. Aren't you going to smoke?

Bride. No, I thank you.

The Jovial Young Man. Lord, no! She must not! The noble bride must not permit tobacco smoke to contaminate her rosy lips. [*They all laugh.*]

The Vivacious Girl. May I have a cigarette, too?

The Jovial Young Man. You be careful or the same misfortune may happen to you at any minute that happened to Lucy [*pointing to the Bride, he hands the Vivacious Girl a cigarette.*]

The Vivacious Girl. If my bridegroom shall object to tobacco smoke, he can pack his things and — off.

The Brunette Young Lady. Well, young people, what are we going to do next?

The Melancholy Young Lady. Let's remain here. The park looks so beautiful.

The Blond Young Lady. Oh, I object. We'll remain here until the sun goes down a little and then we'll play tennis. [*They agree.*]

The Melancholy Young Lady. Can't we remain here? Let us enjoy the spring in the garden.

The Jovial Young Man. Let's play tennis. A little exercise is the best cure for romance. And you can enjoy your spring out there as well — you dreamer. [*They laugh.*]

The Disagreeable Young Man. You are as loud as the besiegers of Jericho in your planning.

The Jovial Young Man. Behold! He speaketh. [*They laugh.*]

The Disagreeable Young Man. You

are so overbearing in your jollifications that it is positively disgusting. For the past hour you have been giggling away without the slightest reason. You have so much leisure you do not know what to do with yourselves.

THE BRUNETTE YOUNG LADY. Curt, must you always be the killjoy in a party!

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. If you would at least take yourselves off from here.

THE BRUNETTE YOUNG LADY. But admit that to-day there is reason enough for every kind of jollity.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Is there, indeed? You have finished a costly banquet and now are enjoying a good digestion. You are young and have a healthy animal appetite; but why deck sentimentalism on your horns?

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. Your pardon! Do you suppose that all a person gets out of this remarkable occasion is a good dinner? Have you no appreciation? Do you realize what this day means to all of us?

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Very well, my boy. Now tell me why you are so over-filled with joy?

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. Yes, I will. I am glad that I can celebrate the golden wedding of my grandfather. I am glad that just thirty years ago to-day grandfather founded his factory. I am glad because of our large and happy family and that so many lovely and good and happy people have come here to celebrate this remarkable event; all of them good and prosperous.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Prosperous!

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. Yes, I rejoice at their prosperity.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. The laborers down there in the foundry, however, are not as over-joyed at this prosperity as you are. For this prosperity of yours they have been starving these past thirty years.

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. Grandfather was always good to his employees.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Indeed! Our grandfather has managed by hook or by crook to amass an enormous fortune and you are glad that his fortune is now made and you do not have to resort to questionable means.

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN [*hurt*]. Questionable means? You do not intend to assert that our grandpapa . . .

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. I assert nothing. But mark you this. There is only one honest way to gain a large fortune: inheriting it. You cannot earn it without resorting to questionable means.

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. Shame! to say a thing like that!

THE BRUNETTE YOUNG LADY. Shame to say that of grandfather.

[*All of them are upset and disturbed. Grandmother appears on the balcony.*]

GRANDMOTHER. Why, children, what is it? What's wrong?

THE SENTIMENTAL HIGH SCHOOL GIRL. Why, grandma, just think of it! Curt said that grandpa made his fortune by questionable means.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. I did not say exactly that —

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. Yes, you did.

THE OTHERS [*chiming in*]. You said that. Yes, you said that.

GRANDMOTHER [*as energetically as possible for her*]. I think you are in error, Curt. In the entire fortune of your grandpa there is not a single copper that was not earned by him in the most honest way.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. But look, grandma,— what I said was — generally in those cases no one —

GRANDMOTHER [*hurt*]. When I tell you this, boy, it *is so*. When I tell you anything, my child, you should never doubt it.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Yes, grandma, you are quite right. But I maintain that human learning and experience have proved —

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. Why don't you stop? Do you perhaps want to insult grandma? You are taking too great an advantage of our good nature — I'll tell you that!

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. If you folks had any sense —

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. Don't you know enough . . .

THE OTHER GRANDCHILDREN. . . . to shut up. [*Attacks him.*] Indeed. He's right. Stop — shut up!

[*The Disagreeable Young Man, in spite of this scene, wants to continue, but the protests of the others drown his voice. He casts a contemptuous look at them, shrugs his shoulders, throws himself on the sofa and begins to read.*]

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. Now don't trouble yourself about him any longer, grandma dear. Here, rest yourself nicely in this chair among us.

THE JOVIAL YOUNG MAN. There, grandma! The old folks are there at table. We young people are here in the fresh air. We lacked only the youngest one of us all. And here you are.

[*There is a glad assent as the Grandmother sits down.*]

THE VIVACIOUS GIRL. Are you quite comfortable, grandma dear? Would you like something to rest your feet on?

GRANDMOTHER. Thanks, my child, I am quite all right, and I am very happy.

THE BLOND YOUNG LADY. Yes, grandma, you ought to feel happy.

THE BRUNETTE YOUNG LADY. How young you look, and how lovely and rosy!

THE BRIDE. Grandma?

GRANDMOTHER. What is it, my angel?

THE BRIDE. Tell me, how does a woman manage so that she is admired by her husband for full fifty years, as you are by grandfather?

THE BRUNETTE YOUNG LADY. Yes, how did you manage that?

GRANDMOTHER. You will all be loved and admired after fifty years as I have been. A person must be good. We must love each other.

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. But, grandmother, is it not wonderful at seventy and seventy-five to love so beautifully and purely as you and grandfather have loved?

GRANDMOTHER. You must always be good and patient with each other, and brave. Never lose courage.

THE VIVACIOUS GIRL. But look, grandma, not even I could be as brave as you have been. And no one can ever say that I lose courage. [*They all laugh.*] I still shudder when I think how in those days in March of Forty-eight you had to run away! Or in the Sixties when the city was bombarded, you with my mamma and Aunt Olga escaped from the burning house . . .

THE SENTIMENTAL HIGH SCHOOL GIRL. How interesting that was! Tell us another story, grandma. [*There is loud assent.*] Yes, yes, grandma shall tell us another story!

GRANDMOTHER. But I have already told you so much. You heard all our history.

THE SENTIMENTAL HIGH SCHOOL GIRL. Not I, grandma; I have not heard the story of when you got lost in the *Friedrichsrode* forest.

GRANDMOTHER. That story I have told you so often, children. Ask your mother about it; she'll tell you.

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. But, grandma, I haven't heard it, either. Just tell us that one and we'll go to play tennis.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. If you'll pardon me, grandma, I believe you ought to tell us a different incident today. I've heard that history so often. Tell us something contemporaneous. Tell us about the first sewing machine, or the first railroad, or about crinolines or contemporary theater or art.

THE BLOND YOUNG LADY. No. Tell us about the woods.

THE OTHERS. Yes, yes, that's right,—the story of how you got lost.

[*The Disagreeable Young Man shrugs his shoulder and buries his head in his book. Grandmother begins to narrate, and the circle of her admiring and attentive audience grows narrower.*]

GRANDMOTHER. Well, my children, it happened in the year eighteen hundred and forty, a year after grandfather was almost shot by error. In those days the happenings took us quite far away from here to *Friedrichsrode*, my dears, where you have never been. Your grandfather had a small estate there, and that's how we made our livelihood. We always wished and prayed to get the management of the large estate of the Count of Schwanhausen. But we lived there humbly in the little house.

THE BLOND YOUNG LADY. Was my mamma home then?

GRANDMOTHER. No, she was not in this world yet. But a year later she was born. So your grandfather and I lived then in this little red-roofed house. Your grandfather used to be busy with the land the entire day. Those days I was taking

on weight, and to reduce I would take long walks through the country. One day in October — in the afternoon — it was beautiful sunny autumn weather — as usual I went again on my long walk. The country there is very beautiful — all hills — covered with dense forests. This afternoon my way led into the famous forest of *Friedrichsrode*. When there I kept on walking — here and there I would stop to pick a flower.

THE BLOND YOUNG LADY. Don't forget, grandma, that it was quite late when you left your house.

GRANDMOTHER. You are correct, my dear. After our dinner I had some things to attend to in the house and that is why I started that day later than usual. I was walking through the forest, going in deeper and deeper and suddenly I began to realize that it was getting dark. It was in the autumn and the days were getting short. When I saw how dark it was I turned homeward. But in the meanwhile evening came sooner than I counted, and suddenly it got dark altogether. Now, thought I, I must hustle. I hurried, as well as I could, but as much as I hurried I did not get home. Had I gone home the right way I would have reached it then, and so it dawned on me that I had lost my way.

THE SENTIMENTAL HIGH SCHOOL GIRL. Great Heavens . . .

GRANDMOTHER. Indeed, my child, I was really lost in the woods and in the *Friedrichsrode* forest, besides. What that meant you cannot now realize. Since that time these woods have been considerably cleared. Then also we live in a different world to-day. But in those days *Friedrichsrode* forest was a very, very dismal place. It spread away into the outskirts of the Harz Mountains and was a wild, primæval, godforsaken forest where highway robbers were hiding. And in the winter it was full of the wolves from the mountains.

[*There is a short pause.*]

THE VIVACIOUS GIRL. And what did you do, grandmother?

GRANDMOTHER. Really, my child, a great anxiety came upon me. I stood still and tried to fix my direction. Then I turned to a path which I figured ought to lead me home. After I walked a half hour, however, I found that the forest instead of getting lighter was getting thicker and thicker. Three or four times I changed the direction, but no matter what I did I was walking deeper and deeper into the dark woods. Although the moon was shining then, the branches of the trees were so thick that I could see but little. And that which I saw only frightened me all the more. Every tree stump, every overhanging bough excited my fear. My feet were continuously caught in the roots of big trees and the undergrowth tore my bleeding face and feet; and it was getting cold. I felt frozen. And dismally quiet, terribly dark was the night in the forest. —

[*There is a pause and suspense.*]

THE SENTIMENTAL HIGH SCHOOL GIRL. Good heavens, how perfectly terrible!

GRANDMOTHER. Then I collected all my wits. I said to myself, if I keep on walking I will lose my way all the more. I ought to remain where I am and wait. When grandfather arrives at home and misses me he will start a search with all the help and people. They will go into the woods with torchlights — and then I will see the lights from the distance and hear them call — and in that way I can get home.

THE MELANCHOLY GIRL. How clever of our grandma!

THE VIVACIOUS GIRL. And how brave!

GRANDMOTHER. After I figured it out that way I looked about for a sheltered nook. In between two great big tree trunks there was a cave, like a little house, a place all filled with soft moss. A pleasant camping place. I fell into this and prepared myself for a long wait. I waited and waited. The night peopled the woods with every kind of sound. There was whistling, whispering, humming, blowing, screeching and once from a distance a long-drawn deep howling. This, undoubtedly, was the wolves.

THE SENTIMENTAL HIGH SCHOOL GIRL [*frightened*]. Merciful God!

GRANDMOTHER. Then even I lost my courage. I wanted to run, run as long as my legs would carry me. But I realized that the wiser thing was to be brave and to remain. So I set my teeth and kept on waiting. And then gradually the howling ceased. So, I sat there on this moss bank gazing before me and thought of many things. Suddenly I

heard a noise. I straightened up and listened. It was a breaking sound and a rustle as though some one were brushing aside the underbrush. . . . The noise was getting nearer and nearer.

THE SENTIMENTAL HIGH SCHOOL GIRL. Oh!

GRANDMOTHER. I was all ears. I could clearly distinguish now that the sound was the footstep of a human being. Frightened, I started through the darkness and in the dull moonlight I saw that actually a man was wading through the thick underbrush. What was I to do? I pressed against the tree trunk and my fast and loud-beating heart seemed to be in my throat. The man was coming directly toward me. When he was about three paces away from me and I could distinguish his features, I felt like fainting. It was "Red Mike," a very dangerous fellow from our neighborhood; every one knew that he was a robber. Later on he was imprisoned for murder, but he escaped from the prison. Now he was there. . . . What should I do?

THE VIVACIOUS GIRL [*breathlessly*]. What did you do, grandma?

THE SENTIMENTAL HIGH SCHOOL GIRL. Great heavens!

GRANDMOTHER. Frenzied, I pressed against the tree trunk. I wanted to hide, but the robber came directly toward me. It was as though he could see me even in this darkness and behind the tree trunk. Later on when he was caught, I found out, that he had prepared this very place for his night's resting place. He had brought all this soft moss there. Of course, I did not know that he just came there to rest himself. All I saw was that he was making directly for me. Then such a great fear seized me that instead of pressing against the tree and letting him go past me I shrieked just as he came within reaching distance and began to run away.

[*There is a pause and feverish suspense.*]

THE MELANCHOLY YOUNG LADY. And what did the robber do?

GRANDMOTHER. My sudden outcry and quick dash and flight scared him for the moment, but as soon as I appeared in the moonlight, he saw that it was only a woman who had frightened him. He hesitated about a half a minute and then started to pursue me. I flew. I was young then and I could run fast. But it was dark and I did not know my way. As I pressed forward I ran into a low branch and tore my cheek so that it bled. My skirt was torn into shreds. Suddenly I stumbled and fell to the ground. I hurt myself quite painfully, but in spite of that I rose quickly again and commenced to run. And the robber after me all the time. I could always hear his footsteps in my wake. My legs were about to give up under me when I got an idea to hide behind a stout tree trunk. But the robber began to look through the underbrush in the spot where he last saw me and he finally found me. He came near me.

THE VIVACIOUS GIRL. How terrible!

GRANDMOTHER. With one single leap I jumped aside and started to run again. Once more I fell down and again I rose. Aimlessly I ran wildly over roots and stones and the robber kept right on after me. . . . And the distance between me and my pursuer was getting smaller and smaller. Then all of a sudden I heard the sound of his footsteps close to me — to escape him I tried to dash away to the side of him but with a sudden leap he was by my side. Grabbing me by my shoulder he threw me on the ground and I fell upon my back. He had run so fast that he dashed a couple of paces past me. He turned about. . . . And then I saw that he had a long knife in his hand.

THE SENTIMENTAL HIGH SCHOOL GIRL [*horrified*]. Merciful heaven!

GRANDMOTHER. I could not budge. . . . And unspeakable fear seized me. . . . Then I uttered a piercing shriek. . . . The robber approached me. . . . I cried out. . . .

[*There is a pause.*]

THE MELANCHOLY GIRL. Then, then —

THE VIVACIOUS GIRL. Well, what then? What?

GRANDMOTHER. I cried out like an insane person. . . . Now the robber was near me. . . . He bent over me. . . . Suddenly a voice sounded,—"*who is crying here?*" the voice seemed to be near — the footsteps were audible —"who's crying here?" it asked the second time. . . . The branches parted and a man in a hunting habit with a gun in his hand appeared. The robber took to his heels and flew into

the woods. The hunter now came near me and called to a second man who followed. They helped me to rise and they carried me over to a small clearing. There I saw a light buggy into which they lifted me. Soon they fetched the horses and in a half hour I was in the Schwanhausen castle sipping hot brandy which they had prepared for me. The man in the hunting habit was the Count of Schwanhausen, who had been hunting in the woods.

THE SENTIMENTAL HIGH SCHOOL GIRL. How interesting!

GRANDMOTHER. In the castle I quite recovered. Then the Count ordered another carriage to drive me home and at six in the morning I landed safely in our house. Your grandpa was sick with worry. . . . He and his people had searched for me in the woods for hours. And that's how I was almost lost. A few days later grandpa went to thank the Count for my rescue. The Count took a liking to him.

THE BLOND YOUNG LADY. That was the old Count?

GRANDMOTHER. Yes, it was the old Count. The benefactor of all of us. Grandfather thanked him courteously for my rescue. The Count took a liking to him and soon after that grandfather got the management of the entire Schwanhausen estate, which proved the cornerstone of his good fortune. And that, my dears, is the story of my night wander in the forest of *Friedrichsrode*.

[*Amid general approval, Grandma is surrounded. Everybody is indebted to her. They all speak at once, except the The Disagreeable Young Man.*]

"We thank you cordially."

"It was wonderful, grandma, dear."

"Interesting."

"Beautiful."

THE VIVACIOUS GIRL. Grandma is a story-telling genius!

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. A most wonderful one!

GRANDMOTHER. Very well, my dears, but now run along to your tennis game. I'll come over later to watch on. [*They all agree.*]

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. Three cheers for our very dear beloved charming grandma.

[*They all cheer three times, then they surround her, kiss her cheeks and head and stroke her hair.*]

THE BLOND YOUNG LADY. *Adieu* — old sweetheart.

THE BRUNETTE YOUNG LADY. *Auf wiedersehen* — precious grandma!

THE SENTIMENTAL HIGH SCHOOL GIRL [*inspired*]. Grandma. . . . ! [*She rushes over to her and covers her with kisses.*]

[*Grandma bears all these amiabilities with pleasurable tolerance. She strokes and pats the grandchildren and as they retire, she fondly gazes after them, nodding to them with laughter.*]

GRANDMOTHER. Curt — are not you going with the others?

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. No.

GRANDMOTHER. Why not, Curt? Why don't you follow the others?

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. They think that I am bad, and I know that they are stupid.

[*Grandmother seats herself in silence. The Disagreeable Young Man continues to read. He lights a new cigarette. While lighting the cigarette* —]

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Grandma!

GRANDMOTHER. What is it, my child?

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Whatever you say might, of course, never be questioned . . .

GRANDMOTHER. No, my child.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. But do tell me, grandma, did that story really happen in that way?

GRANDMOTHER. What story?

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. The night wander through the *Friedrichsrode* forest.

GRANDMOTHER. Certainly it happened.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Exactly as you told it? Are you quite sure that you remember all those details.

GRANDMOTHER. Yes. Why?

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Oh, just so. I merely wanted to inquire, grandma.

GRANDMOTHER. But why did you want to?

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. I was just interested. Thank you very much. Do not let me disturb you further, grandma.

[*He takes up his book and continues to read. The Grandmother remains seated, but is greatly embarrassed. She would like to keep on gazing into the park and enjoying her quiet, but she is unable to concentrate her thoughts. She is getting more and more disturbed. There is a pause.*]

GRANDMOTHER. Curt!

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Yes — grandma, dear.

GRANDMOTHER. Curt, why have you asked me if the forest incident happened that way?

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. I merely wanted to find out, grandma.

GRANDMOTHER. You just wanted to find out. But one does not ask such things without some good reason.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. I was interested.

GRANDMOTHER. Interested, but why are you interested?

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Just in general. But do not get disturbed on account of that, grandma.

[*The Grandmother is silent.*]

[*The Disagreeable Young Man picks up his book. The Grandmother wants to drop the subject at this point. She does not succeed, but continues to look over toward the young man. He reads on.*]

GRANDMOTHER. Curt!

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Yes, grandma, dear.

GRANDMOTHER. Curt, you shall tell me this instant the reason you asked if the incident really happened that way!

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. But, grandma . . . I have already told you that . . .

GRANDMOTHER. Don't you tell me again that you asked because the matter interested you. You would have never asked such a question if you did not have some special reason for it.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. But, grandma —

GRANDMOTHER. Curt, if you do not this moment tell me why you said that, then I will never — [*her voice becomes unusually strong and shakes*] I never in my life will speak to you again.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. But, grandma, I do not want to insult you.

GRANDMOTHER. You will not insult me if you will be sincere and open. Be sincere always. . . . And you will not insult me. But when your trying to hide something from me, that's when you insult me. This *cannot* remain in this way. I must know what you are thinking of. I must know that.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Grandma, I was afraid you would be angry with me.

GRANDMOTHER. If you keep on concealing things I shall be angry. No matter what you have to say I will not hold it against you.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Are you not angry now?

GRANDMOTHER. No. I promise you I will not be angry. Say whatever you please.

[*The Disagreeable Young Man hesitates.*]

GRANDMOTHER. Well, then — out with it — speak up, my child — be it what it may as long as it is frank and sincere. Speak up, now. Come!

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Very well then, grandma. It is impossible that the story could happen in that manner.

GRANDMOTHER [*offended*]. You mean that I told an untruth?

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Oh, no. I did not say that the incident did not happen. I just maintain that it could not have happened in that fashion.

GRANDMOTHER. But why not?

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. On account of the details. Let us take it for granted, grandma, that as you state you commenced your exercise walk in the afternoon . . .

GRANDMOTHER. Yes.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Let's say that you had household duties and started out quite late — about four o'clock.

GRANDMOTHER [*disturbed, but following the cross-examination intently*]. Yes.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Very well, you started at four o'clock. The walk was a good one and consumed — let us say one hour and a half.

GRANDMOTHER. Yes.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Yes? This brings us to half-past five o'clock. In October and in a dense forest besides at half-past five it gets fairly dark at

that hour. It was then that you lost your way?

THE GRANDMOTHER [*nods her head in assent*].

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Another hour and a half spent in wandering — that brings us to seven o'clock. You now reached the night lodging of the robber — here you were resting?

GRANDMOTHER. Exactly.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Quite right. Here you were waiting and resting — now we want to allow a long time for it — three — let us say — three and a half hours.

GRANDMOTHER [*involuntarily*]. Not that long . . .

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Oh, yes . . . let us . . . we'll then have reached half-past ten o'clock. It could not have been later when this forest bandit came. These pirates never go to their bed earlier. They shun light and must get their sleep while the world is the darkest. He could not sleep during the day even in the darkest forests. In short, then, it was half-past ten?

GRANDMOTHER. Half-past ten.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Now began the flight and the pursuit. You ran — let us say — full twenty minutes. That is a great deal. I was a track runner in college and I know what a twenty-minute stretch means. Shall we say twenty minutes?

GRANDMOTHER. Twenty minutes . . .

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. In any circumstances it was not even eleven when you were safely out of danger?

GRANDMOTHER. Yes.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. And — and a half hour later you were sipping hot brandy in the Schwanhausen castle?

GRANDMOTHER. Yes.

[*The Disagreeable Young Man is silent.*]

GRANDMOTHER [*shaking with excitement*]. And — what else?

[*The Disagreeable Young Man is silent.*]

GRANDMOTHER [*she shakes with fear as to what will follow, but forces herself to face it*]. Well, say on . . . what else? . . .

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. At six on the following morning you reached your home and . . . [*He pauses.*]

GRANDMOTHER [*if her loud-speaking could be called an outcry, then she cries out*]. Yes . . . what else? . . . What happened then? . . . Go on . . . say it . . . what else?

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. [*He makes a new attempt to tell everything bravely at once, but hesitates.*] In the morning at six you arrived at home. The others had no idea as to the distance between *Schwanhausen* and *Friederichsrode*. But I wanted to see it myself, so last year with a friend I made a walking trip through that country. I tried this distance. In a half hour of slow walking I reached from one place to the other, and the horses in the Count's stables and the state roads were then in as good condition as to-day. Well, then you started from the castle at half-past five in the morning; but you reached there at half-past eleven the preceding night. . . . You spent six entire hours in the castle. . . . Then, another point — they all speak of the count, the "benefactor of us all," as the "old count." . . . When he died five years ago he was, of course, an old count — an old man of seventy. . . . But thirty-five years ago he was a young count of thirty years of age.

[*The Grandmother stares blindly at The Disagreeable Young Man. Alarmed over Grandma's fright, he rises. He would very much like to make up to her, but he lacks words. The Grandmother rises. She is trembling. With a shaking hand she is nervously setting her dress to rights. Twice she turns to the young man to speak to him, but is unable to utter a word. Then she turns; she is about to return into the house, but remains near the doorstep. Again she turns; then she is about to go in, but turns again and remains standing.*]

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN [*frightened*]. Grandma, you gave me your word that you would not be angry.

GRANDMOTHER [*she stumbles forward a few steps. She is disturbed, shivering, beside herself, complaining, almost sobbing*]. You are an evil child! You are a bad, bad and evil child! For fifty years I have told the same story . . . always the same, same way . . . and that it happened differently never, never even came into my mind.

[*Curtain.*]

THE RIGHTS OF THE SOUL

A Play

By Giuseppe Giacosa

Translated by Theodora Marcone.

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CHARACTERS

PAOLO.
MARIO.
ANNA.
MADDALENA.

PLACE: *A villa at Brianza.*
TIME: *The Present.*

Applications for the right of performing THE RIGHTS OF THE SOUL must be made to Frank Shay, who may be addressed in care of Stewart & Kidd Company.

THE RIGHTS OF THE SOUL

ONE ACT

BY GIUSEPPE GIACOSA

[SCENE: *A living-room well furnished in an old fashioned style but not shabbily. An open fire-place which is practical. A sofa. A writing desk. A closet at the back. Door leading into Anna's room at the left. Window at the right.*

Paolo discovered seated at the writing desk upon which there is a confusion of papers.]

[*Servant — Maddalena enters.*]

PAOLA. Well, has he returned yet?

MADDALENA. Not yet.

PAOLO. He has taken a lot of time!

MADDALENA. I have been to look for him at the post-office café.

PAOLO. I told you to look in his room or in the garden. Was it necessary to run all over the country?

MADDALENA. Well, he wasn't there. I thought — he wasn't at the café either, but they told me where he was. He'll be back shortly. He went to the station at Poggio to meet the engineer of the water-works. The tax collector saw him walking in that direction. He always walks. But he will return by the stage for the engineer's sake. The stage should be here at any moment. It is sure though — but are you listening?

PAOLO. No, you may go.

MADDALENA. Yes, sir. But it is sure that if the engineer of the water-works really has arrived, your brother will not go away to-morrow. You and the Madame intend leaving to-morrow, don't you?

PAOLO. Yes, no. I don't know — yes, we will go to-morrow. Leave me alone.

MADDALENA. All right, but see if I'm wrong; I say that your brother will not go to-morrow, nor the day after to-morrow. Here he is.

MARIO. Were you looking for me?

PAOLO. Yes, for the last hour.

MADDALENA. Mr. Paolo — here asked me —

PAOLO. I did not ask you anything. Go away. [*He takes her by the arm and pushes her out.*]

MARIO. What has happened?

PAOLO. She is insufferable. She isn't listening at the door, is she?

MARIO. No, be calm. I hear her in the garden. What has happened. You look worried.

PAOLO. [*After a pause.*] Do you know why Luciano killed himself?

MARIO. No.

PAOLO. He killed himself for love. For the love of Anna. I have the proofs — they are there. I just found it out to-day, a moment ago. He has killed himself for the love of my wife. You and I were his relatives; he was a companion of my youth, my dearest friend. He tried to force her to love him. Anna repulsed him. He insisted; Anna responded firmly. Highly strung as he was, he killed himself.

MARIO. How did you find out?

PAOLO. I have the proofs, I tell you. I have been reading them for an hour. I am still stunned! They have been there for a month. You know that as soon as I received the telegram in Milan which announced his suicide in London, I ran to Luciano's room and gathered all his papers, made a packet of them, sealed it and brought them here.

MARIO. I told you to burn them.

PAOLO. I wanted to in fact, but afterward I thought it better to await until the authorities of the hospital, to whom he left the estate, had verified the accounts. The Syndic came here an hour ago, at the order of the sub-Prefect, to give me the wallet which was found on the body and which our Consul at London had sent to the Minister of Foreign Af-

fairs. I was just putting them away into the desk, when I felt the desire, I don't know why, to look for the reason of his suicide which no one seemed able to explain. [*Mario starts.*] You know? You suspect the reason?

MARIO. I suspected —

PAOLO. Suspected! You knew of this love?

MARIO. There, there — I will tell you, don't excite yourself!

PAOLO. No — answer me! You knew?

MARIO. I felt it — yes, that Luciano had lost his head.

PAOLO. And you never told me anything?

MARIO. What had I to tell you? Seen by others these things appear greater and more offensive than they are. And then I might have been wrong; I only see you and Anna during your short visits to the country. If you, who are with her all the year, did not see anything — On the other hand, Anna was always on her guard, she knew perfectly how to defend herself.

PAOLO. Oh, Anna! Anna is a saint! I have always thought of her as one. But now —

MARIO. Go on — tell me.

PAOLO. In the wallet I found a letter and noticed it was in Anna's handwriting.

MARIO. It was perfectly natural that your wife should write to our cousin.

PAOLO. Naturally. In fact I have read it. Here it is. [*Mario starts to take the letter.*] No, listen. [*Paolo reads.*] "You write me —" [*Speaking.*] There is no heading. [*Reads.*] "You write me that if I do not respond you will return immediately. I love my husband, that is my reply. This and only this forever. I beg you not to torment me. Anna."

MARIO. Of course.

PAOLO. The scoundrel.

MARIO. What date is that letter?

PAOLO. Luciano himself has noted the hour and date when he received it. He has written here in pencil: "Received to-day, June 26th, 11 A. M." He killed himself before noon.

MARIO. Poor devil! One can see it was a stroke of insanity; the writing demonstrates that.

PAOLO. You understand of course, that I did not stop there. I opened the wallet. I found four other letters from Anna all on the same subject and in the same tone. The first is of three years ago. There are few words; returning a letter Luciano had written. I looked for this letter of Luciano — it is not here. He must have destroyed it. He kept only hers. Then there is a little note from Rome; you know Anna visited her mother in Rome for a month last winter. It is evident that our friend followed her. Anna would not see him. Then there is a long one which must have been written when he was recovering from that fall he had from his horse. It is the only long one among the five — written in affectionate terms, reasoning and begging; a wonderful letter, good, noble; read — read.

MARIO [*turning away*]. No, no, no.

PAOLO. Listen, just a moment.

MARIO. I don't like to.

PAOLO. She does nothing but speak of me, of our brotherly youth. She also speaks of you. She says —

MARIO. No, I beg of you. It is useless. I know what kind of a woman my sister-in-law is and I do not need proofs of her virtue. Why do you bother with those poor letters? Is it so painful that you have found them?

PAOLO. Painful? It is painful that I am not able to weep for a false relative who wished to rob —

MARIO. Let him alone. He is dead and he has not robbed you of anything. If he had lived he would not have robbed you of anything, the same. Anna knew how —

PAOLO. And this? And this? You count as little? Is this painful? I never had the shadow of a doube about Anna, but — nor has the thought even passed through my mind — but it is different not to have doubted and not to have thought, than to possess the palpable proof of her faith and love. "I love my husband." It is the refrain of all her letters.

MARIO. Was it necessary that she tell you this?

PAOLO. She did not tell it to me, she told it to him. She told it to him — do you understand? Luciano had all the qualities which attract a woman. He was younger, better looking than I, well spoken, full of fire and courage.

MARIO. How it pleases you, eh? To praise him now!

PAOLO. Painful? If I had burned, as you wished, those papers and then one day I should have discovered this love, who could then have lifted this suspicion from my mind?

MARIO. The certainty makes you suspicious!

PAOLO. What do you mean?

MARIO. If you had feared this a year ago, that which has happened would not have occurred. I was wrong not to have opened your eyes. A long way off, perhaps Luciano would not have killed himself.

PAOLO. But I would have lacked the proof.

MARIO. Your tranquility costs much — to the others.

PAOLO. You can't pretend that I should feel badly about the fate of Luciano?

MARIO. I am not speaking of him.

PAOLO. Of whom?

MARIO. Of your wife. Think what she must be suffering!

PAOLO. Do you think she blames herself?

MARIO. Of course.

PAOLO. I have noticed that she was distressed but not agitated.

MARIO. You do not see the continuous things, you only see the unexpected. Besides, Anna is mistress of herself.

PAOLO. And she has done her duty.

MARIO. It is a long time that she has done her duty.

PAOLO. I shall know how to comfort her, there, I shall know how to cheer her. You shall see, Mario. I feel that we have returned to the first days of our marriage, that I possess her only from to-day.

MARIO. Leave it to time. You have read — you have known. It is enough. It is useless that Anna knows you know.

PAOLO. She was here when the Syndic gave me the wallet. But she went out immediately.

MARIO. She does not know, then, that you have read?

PAOLO. She will have imagined it.

MARIO. No. And in any case she would be grateful if you pretended to ignore. . . .

PAOLO. Let us be frank. Don't let's argue. Nothing is more dreadful than to plan out a line of conduct in these matters. What she has done, Anna has done for me. I must think how to repay her. She has done this for me, for me, do you understand?

MARIO. And who says the contrary? See how you excite yourself.

PAOLO. Excite myself! Certainly, I will not go and say: "I have read your letters and I thank you very much!" One understands that when I speak of comforting her and of cheering her I intend to do it with the utmost tenderness, with the utmost confidence. I have always been like that. That was why she loved me. There is no need to change even to please you.

MARIO. How you take it!

PAOLO. It is you who take it badly. You have not said a just word to me. I thought better of you. One would say, to hear you, that this discovery was a disgrace. What has happened new from this discovery? Luciano is dead a month ago, the first grief is passed. If I did continue to ignore everything he would not return to life! He did not arrive to do me the harm he wanted to; so peace be to his soul. There remains the certainty of my wife's love and for this, think as you wish, I rejoice for the best fortune which could befall me.

MARIO. Come here. [*He places an arm aroud Paolo's shoulders.*] Are you persuaded that I love you?

PAOLO. Yes.

MARIO. Well then, if you are content, so am I. Is it all right?

PAOLO. Yes. Now go and pack your bag.

MARIO. Ah, that reminds me, I cannot go to-morrow.

PAOLO. No!

MARIO. The engineer Falchi has arrived. The day after to-morrow there is the meeting of the water-company.

PAOLO. Send it to the devil.

MARIO. I cannot, I am the president.

PAOLO. It was arranged that we were to leave to-day. We put it off on your account.

MARIO. How could it be helped? I had to sell the hay. It is now a question of three days, four at the most.

PAOLO. Suppose Anna and I go meanwhile? The rent of the chalet started

fifteen days ago. You can join us as soon as you are free.

MARIO. If you think so —

PAOLO. I'll tell you. The day after to-morrow is Anna's birthday. Until the business kept me in Milan all of July, we always passed that day together — just Anna and I. We did not do this on purpose, but things turned out so. Last year I was able to be free early in July and we came here to stay until September. Well, three days before her birthday, Anna begged me to take her for a trip to Switzerland. She did not tell me, you understand, the reason for her desire, but insisted upon leaving immediately. We went to Interlaken and from there we went up to Murren. The day of Saint Anna we were at Murren. The place was so lovely, Anna liked it so much, that then and there I arranged for a chalet for this year. Fifteen days ago you — who never go anywhere, proposed to accompany us —

MARIO. Did you find it indiscreet of me?

PAOLO. No. You saw that Anna was pleased. She is very fond of you.

MARIO. I know.

PAOLO. When you had to postpone your leaving it was the same as to propose that we wait for you. But the first delay would still have allowed us to arrive in time; this second one will not and I, for my part, now especially desire to be there at the date arranged. It is childish if you wish —

MARIO. No. All right. I will join you there.

PAOLO. We postponed leaving until to-morrow to await you; but now that you cannot come immediately we could leave this evening. [*Jumping up.*] I must go — to get out of here. Those letters —

MARIO. Burn them. Give them to me.

PAOLO. Ah, no. Not yet.

MARIO. Go. Go to-night; it is better. But will Anna be ready?

ANNA. [*Who has entered.*] To do what?

MARIO. I was telling Paolo that I could not leave to-morrow; nor for three or four days. It is useless that you two remain here in the heat to wait for me. Paolo must be back in Milan at the beginning of September; every day shortens his vacation. I am old enough to travel alone; as soon as I am free I will join you. What do you say?

ANNA. As you wish.

MARIO. I also desire to thoroughly clean the house and garden. Your presence would disturb me, and mine is necessary.

PAOLO. And as Mario cannot accompany us, we may as well leave this evening.

ANNA. So soon?

PAOLO. Your luggage is almost finished.

MARIO. You will gain a day. At this season of the year it is better to travel by night than by day. It is full moon now and the Gottard road is charming.

ANNA [*distractedly*]. Yes. Yes.

MARIO [*to Paolo*]. Then you had better go immediately to the stable in the piazza and tell them to hold a carriage in readiness. At what time does the train leave from Poggio?

PAOLO. At seven-thirty.

MARIO. Tell him to be here at six. I would send Battista to order it, but the engineer has taken him with him. On the other hand, it is better that you see the carriage, they have some antediluvian arks!

PAOLO. And why don't you go? He knows you and you know his arsenal — you could choose better.

MARIO. You are right. Anna, I will send Maddalena to help you with your luggage?

ANNA. Yes, thank you, Mario. Send Maddalena to help me.

MARIO [*going off*]. And dinner is at five.

PAOLO. Yes.

[*Mario exits. Silence. Anna takes a few steps toward the desk. Paolo goes impetuously to Anna and takes her in his arms and kisses her. She breaks away violently.*]

ANNA. Oh — horrors! [*The words escape from her lips involuntarily.*]

PAOLO [*drawing back*]. Anna!

ANNA. There was one of my letters in that wallet, wasn't there?

PAOLO. Yes, there was.

ANNA. You have read it?

PAOLO. Yes.

ANNA. I have killed a man and you embrace me for that?

PAOLO. I did not want to. I was

tempted not to tell you. Mario advised me not to. Then when I saw you — you filled me with tenderness! But what did you say, Anna?

ANNA. Pardon me. And promise me that you will never speak of all this again, either here or hereafter, directly or indirectly — never.

PAOLO. I promise.

ANNA. You will not keep your promise.

PAOLO. Oh!

ANNA. You will not keep it. I know you. What a misfortune that you should have known it! I saw it in your eyes when I came in, that you knew. I had hoped that you would always have ignored it. I prayed so. But as soon as I entered I saw immediately. [*With imperceptible accent of mocking pity.*] You had a modest and embarrassed air. I know you so well. Do you want to hear how well? When Mario proposed you go for the carriage, I thought — he will not go. When you sent him instead, I smiled.

PAOLO. I noticed it, but I did not understand.

PAOLO. That's nothing. That you should read me is natural.

ANNA. In exchange, eh? And listen — when Mario was leaving, I also thought — now the minute we are alone — he will come to me and embrace me.

PAOLO. You imagine very well. . . .

ANNA. This was also natural, wasn't it?

PAOLO. I love you so much, Anna. [*A long pause.*] It is strange that in your presence I have a sense of restraint. I tell you something and immediately I think should I tell her? Was it better I kept silent? It is the first time I have had this feeling toward you. We both need distraction.

ANNA. Yes, but to-day I do not leave.

PAOLO. No? But you said —

ANNA. I have thought better. There is not the time to get ready.

PAOLO. Your luggage is ready.

ANNA. Oh, there is a lot to do.

PAOLO. We have eight hours yet.

ANNA. I am tired.

PAOLO. Mario has just gone to order the carriage.

ANNA. It can be for another day.

PAOLO. Perhaps to-morrow —

ANNA. Not to-day, certainly.

PAOLO. I do not know how to tell Mario. It looks like a whim.

ANNA. Oh, Mario will understand.

PAOLO. More than I do.

ANNA. I did not wish to say —

PAOLO. Anna, you do not pardon me for having read those letters.

ANNA. You see, you have already begun to speak of them again! Well, no, no, no, poor Paolo, it is not that. I have nothing to pardon. Believe me. I feel no wrath or bitterness. I would have given, I don't know what, if you had ignored them; for you, for your own good, for your peace, not for me. But I felt that some time or other — [*Pause.*] It has been a useless tragedy — you will see.

PAOLO. What do you mean?

ANNA. I don't know, don't mind me — excuse me — [*Moves up.*]

PAOLO. Are you going?

ANNA. Yes.

PAOLO. So you won't tell me if we go to-morrow?

ANNA. We have time to decide.

PAOLO. Oh, rather. [*Anna exits. Silence.*] A useless tragedy! [*Sits with his elbows upon his knees and his head in his hands.*]

MARIO [*coming in*]. There, that is done. And Anna?

PAOLO. She's there. [*Points off.*]

MARIO. Maddalena will be here immediately, she was still at the wash-house. Well? Come, come, shake yourself, throw off that fixed idea. One knows that at the first opportunity — You do well to leave immediately, the trip will distract you.

PAOLO. We do not go.

MARIO. What?

PAOLO. Anna does not want to.

MARIO. Why?

PAOLO [*shrugs his shoulders*].

MARIO. She said so?

PAOLO. She understood, she asked me. . . . I could not deny it.

MARIO. She asked of her own accord, without you saying anything?

PAOLO. Do me the favor of not judging me now. If you knew what I am thinking!

MARIO. Do you wish that I speak to her? I am convinced that to remain here is the worse thing to do.

PAOLO. Try it. Who knows? You

understand her so well! She said so herself.

MARIO. And you promise me not to worry meanwhile?

PAOLO. What is the use of promising? I wouldn't keep it. She said that also. She knows me. Don't you know me?

MARIO. Is she in her room?

PAOLO. I think so.

MARIO. Leave it to me.

PAOLO. Look out. If — no, no, go — go — we shall see afterwards. [*Mario exits. Paolo takes a letter from the wallet, reads it attentively, accentuating the words.*] "You write me that if I do not respond you will return immediately." [*Speaks.*] You write me! Where is that letter? [*Reads.*] "I love my husband, that is my response. This and only this forever. I beg you not to torment me." [*Speaks.*] I beg you not to torment me. Ummm!

MADDALENA. Here I am.

PAOLO. I do not want you. It is not necessary now. If I need you I will call you.

MADDALENA. Excuse me, Mr. Paolo, is it true what they say in the village?

PAOLO. What?

MADDALENA. That the Syndic brought the wallet of Mr. Luciano this morning with a lot of money in it for the poor!

PAOLO. Why — no.

MADDALENA. The servant of the Syndic said so just now at the wash-house.

PAOLO. There was nothing in it, the Syndic also knows that.

MADDALENA. Oh, it would not have been a surprise. Mr. Luciano came here rarely, but when he did he spent.

PAOLO. I am glad to hear it.

MADDALENA. Last year, to Liberata, the widow of the miner who went to America to join his son and to whom you gave fifty lire, well, Mr. Luciano gave her a hundred.

PAOLO. What a story! He wasn't even here at that time.

MADDALENA. Wasn't even here? I saw him —

PAOLO. Nonsense. That woman received word that her husband was killed in the mine and that the son wanted her to come to America, the day I left for Switzerland, a year ago yesterday or today; I remember it because I gave her a little money in gold which I had been able to procure. She was to leave two days later. . . .

MADDALENA. There you are.

PAOLO. There you are nothing. Luciano was not there. I know.

MADDALENA. He arrived the day Liberata started on the trip.

PAOLO. Oh, two days after we left.

MADDALENA. Yes it was. He arrived in the morning.

PAOLO. At his villa.

MADDALENA. No, no, here; but he found only Mr. Mario; he was annoyed, poor man, and left immediately.

PAOLO. Ah, I did not know that. . . . Then you are right. Ah, so he came? You are right. Oh, he was generous! He left all to the hospital.

MADDALENA. Yes, yes. But what hospital?

MARIO [*off stage calls*]. Maddalena!

MADDALENA. Here I am.

MARIO [*entering*]. Go to Madame, she needs you. [*Maddalena exits.*] [*To Paolo.*] I have persuaded her.

PAOLO. How fortunate to have a good lawyer.

MARIO. And as you see, it did not take long.

PAOLO. Want to bet I know how you convinced her?

MARIO. Oh, it was very easy — I said . . .

PAOLO. No, let me tell you. I want my little triumph. You gave up the business which held you here and decided to leave with us.

MARIO. Even that.

PAOLO. Eh? Didn't I know it? When you went away I was just about to tell you and then I wanted to wait and see. So now Anna is disposed to go?

MARIO. Are you sorry?

PAOLO. I should say not! All the more as we are — are we not going to amuse ourselves? The place, the trip, the hotels,— yes, it is better. But the company! To run away there should be few of us.

MARIO. What are you saying?

PAOLO [*putting his two hands on Mario's shoulders and facing him.*] To run away — do you understand? We must be a few. To run away as Anna and I did last year.

MARIO. I do not understand.

PAOLO. You did not tell me that Luci-

ano had been here last year, nor the day that he was here.

MARIO. I don't know. I do not remember. . . .

PAOLO. There you are — there — there — I knew it! And you knew that Anna went away from here to avoid him. And I went with her all unconscious. You saw the husband take a train and run away before the other could arrive!

MARIO. And if it is true. It does not tell you more or less than the letters did.

PAOLO. No, a little more. Everything tells a little more. One grain of sand piles up upon another, then another until it makes the mill-stone which crushes you. It tells a little more. It is one thing to keep away and another to run away. One can keep away a trouble without begging it to keep its distance. But one runs away for fear.

MARIO. Uh-h!

PAOLO. And look here — look — look, let us examine the case. Let us see. It is improbable that he wrote her he was coming. It is sure he did not or she would have responded: "You write me that you are coming. . . . I love my husband — I beg you to remain away."

MARIO. Oh!

PAOLO. So she, foreseeing his intentions, felt that he would come . . . by that divination. . . .

MARIO. You are the first husband to get angry because a wife did her duty.

PAOLO. Uhm! Duty — the ugly word!

MARIO. If there ever was a virtuous woman!

PAOLO. Woman or wife?

MARIO. It is the same.

PAOLO. No, no. A woman is for all; a wife for myself alone. Do you believe one marries a woman because she is virtuous? Never! I marry her because I love her and because I believe she loves me. There are a thousand virtuous women, there is one that I love, one alone who loves me . . . if there is one. . . .

MARIO. Paolo!

PAOLO. And if she loved him? Tell me — and if she loved him? And if she repulsed him for virtue's sake, for duty's sake? Tell me. What remains for me? If he was alive I could fight, I might win out. But he is dead — and has killed himself for love of her. If she loved him no force can tear him from her heart.

MARIO. You think —?

PAOLO. I do not know. It is that — I do not know. And I want to — I want to hear her shout it to my face. And she shall tell me. . . . Oh, I had the feeling the minute I had read the first letter. I did not then understand anything, indeed, I believed; "I love my husband." But I immediately felt a blow here — and it hurt me so! And I did not know what it was. Oh, before some fears assume shape, it takes time. First they gnaw, they gnaw and one does not know what they are. I was content. . . . I told you I was content, I wanted to pursuade myself, but you have seen that fear gnaws at my heart. And if she loved him? Oh, surely! The more admirable eh? All the world would admire her. I, myself, would admire her upon my knees if she were the wife of another. But she is mine. I am not the judge of my wife. I am too intimately concerned, I cannot judge, I am the owner — she is mine — a thing of mine own. I must admire her because, while she could have cheated me altogether, she has only cheated me a little. I see that which she has robbed me of, not that which remains.

MARIO. You are crazy!

PAOLO. Do you not see that I am odious to her?

MARIO. Oh, God!

PAOLO. Odious! You were not here a moment ago. Don't you see that it is necessary that she have your help in order to support my presence?

MARIO. To-day. Because she knows that you have read — did I not tell you? Because it is embarrassing.

PAOLO. Not only to-day. You never move from this place. For fifteen years that you have played at being a farmer, you have not been away for a week. And fifteen days ago you suddenly decided to make a tour of the world. She begged you to.

MARIO. I swear —

PAOLO. I do not believe you. Anna shall have to tell me. [*Paolo starts to exit.*]

MARIO. What are you doing?

PAOLO. I am going to ask her.

MARIO. No, Paolo.

PAOLO. Let me go.

MARIO. No. Maddalena is also there.

PAOLO. Oh, as far as that's concerned — [*Calls.*] Anna — Anna!

MARIO. You are very ungrateful.

PAOLO. If she loved me it did not come hard for her to repulse him. If she loved him, I owe her no gratitude.

ANNA [*entering*]. Did you call me?

[*Mario starts to exit.*]

PAOLO. No, no. Remain. Yes, Anna. I wanted to ask you something. Whatever you say, I shall believe you.

ANNA. Of that I am certain.

PAOLO. Was it you who begged Mario to come with us? Not to-day I don't mean.

ANNA. Neither to-day nor before.

MARIO. You see!

ANNA. I did not beg him nor did I propose it to him. But I must say that if Mario had not come I would not have gone either.

PAOLO. To-day. But fifteen days ago?

MARIO. Listen, this is ridiculous.

ANNA. It is natural that Paolo desires to know and he has the right to question me.

PAOLO. I do not wish to impose my rights.

ANNA. There you are wrong. We must value our own and respect those of the others. Fifteen days ago I would have gone with you alone.

MARIO. Oh, blessed God!

PAOLO. You were afraid that she would say no?

ANNA. But his consent to accompany us greatly relieved me.

PAOLO. Which is to say that my company would have weighed upon you.

ANNA. Not weighed. It would have annoyed me.

PAOLO. May one ask why?

ANNA. You may as well. Because I was shadowed by an unhappiness which you ignored at the time, whereas now you know the reasons. Knowing them, you will understand that I must be very worried, but for the sake of your peace I must hide my unhappiness, seeing that I had nothing to reproach myself with in relation to you. You understand that for two to be together, always together, it would be more difficult to pretend all the time — all the time! While the presence of a third person —

MARIO. But listen — listen —

ANNA. Mario had the good idea to accompany us.

PAOLO. Mario, who knew him!

ANNA. I ignore that.

PAOLO. Did he ever speak of it?

MARIO. Do not reply, Anna, do not answer, come away — he is ill, he does not reason — poor devil — it will pass and he will understand then —

ANNA. No, it is useless.

PAOLO. A useless tragedy, isn't it, Anna?

ANNA. Do you require anything more of me?

PAOLO [*imperiously*]. Yes. I want the letters which you wrote to Luciano.

ANNA. That is just. I will go and get them. [*Exits.*]

PAOLO. All!

[*Anna returns and hands Paolo a key.*]

ANNA. They're in my desk, in the first drawer at the right. They are tied with a black ribbon.

PAOLO. Very well. [*Exits.*]

MARIO. Pardon him, Anna, he does not know what he is doing. He loves you so much? He is rather weak.

ANNA. Oh, without pity!

MARIO. As are the weak. He loves you — he loves you.

ANNA. Worse for him that he loves me. He will lose.

MARIO. No, it is for you to help him.

ANNA. As long as I can.

[*Paolo returns with the letters in his hand, goes to the desk and takes out the others, throws them all into the fire-place and lights them.*]

MARIO. What are you doing? Look, Anna!

[*Anna stands rigid, erect and watches the letters burn, and murmurs as though to herself.*]

ANNA. Gone! Gone! Gone!

[*Paolo comes to Anna with hands clinched as though in prayer, bursts into tears and kneels before her. Mario goes off half in contempt and half in despair.*]

PAOLO [*on his knees*]. And now — can you pardon me?

[*Anna reluctantly rests a hand upon his head, then indulgently and discouragingly.*]

ANNA. Rise — rise.

PAOLO. Tell me that you pardon me.

I swear that I want to die here and now.

ANNA. Yes, yes. Arise; do not remain so. It hurts me.

PAOLO [*getting up*]. I do not know what got into my head — but I have suffered a great deal.

ANNA. Yes, I see. Yes . . . calm yourself.

PAOLO. Mario has no tact . . . it was he who irritated me from the first. [*Anna starts to go.*] Do not go. Stay here a moment. [*Anna sits upon the sofa.*] You see the stroke of madness has passed. It was only because Mario was here. Mario is good, judicious, but his presence irritated me. Yes, yes, you were right. But you should also understand the state of my mind. [*He walks up and down.*] After all, what does all this disturbance mean? It means that I love you — and it seems to me that is the essential thing! One must consider the source of things. It is five years that we are husband and wife and you cannot say I have ever given you the slightest reason for regret. I do not believe so. Five years are five years. I have worked up to a good position, you have always figured in society; a pastime which I would never have enjoyed alone. I had friends, the club, the other husbands after the first year of marriage, in the evenings, I renounced everything. I do not wish to praise myself, but —

ANNA. Please don't walk up and down so much!

PAOLO. Excuse me. Will you allow me to sit here next to you? [*Long silence.*] When shall I see you smile, Anna? No, do not get up. Then it is not true that you have pardoned me!

ANNA. What do you wish, Paolo? What do you wish of me? Say it quickly!

PAOLO. You made me promise never to speak of it.

ANNA. Oh, but I said that you would break your promise immediately. You are wrong though, believe me. Do not ask me anything. When there is no more danger I promise you, and I will keep my promise. I promise that I will tell you everything without your asking me. And it will be good for both of us. But I wish to choose the moment.

PAOLO. All right then. Do not tell me anything, but come away with me, with me alone. I will attend to Mario. He was coming to please you and he will be much happier to see us leave together, as a sign of peace. I understand that it is repulsive to you to re-awaken those memories; all right, instead of awakening them I will make you forget them — I swear it — I swear that I will never speak of them again, but come away with me and you shall see how much love . . .

ANNA. Do not insist, Paolo. If you insist I shall come — but —

PAOLO. No, no, I do not insist. You see me here begging, I do not want you by force. But listen once more, listen. I am grateful, you must understand, for that which you have done. Oh, I shall recompense you for it all my life. I realize there is not a more saintly woman in all the world, but you must enter into my soul and feel a little pity also for me.

ANNA. Ah, ah! [*Laughs bitterly.*]

PAOLO. Why do you prolong this torment? You said when there is no more danger! What danger is there? Upon whom depends this danger — from you or from me? What can time change for us? I have always loved you, I love you now, and in this moment I love you as I have never loved you! Give me your hand — only your hand. God, Anna! You are beautiful! And you are my wife — you are my wife and the oath which you took when we were married, is not only one of faithfulness, but of love. Come away — come away.

ANNA. No, no, no.

PAOLO. No? Are you afraid? Afraid of being unfaithful to him?

ANNA. Paolo — Paolo!

PAOLO. And if I wish it?

ANNA. You cannot wish it.

PAOLO. And if I want?

ANNA. Paolo! —

PAOLO. And if I command?

ANNA. You will, in one moment, destroy all my plan. Think — your violence is a liberation for me.

PAOLO. Oh, come — or speak!

ANNA. Do you wish it so? We have come to that? I have done all that I could.

PAOLO. Yes, go on. Speak!

ANNA. I loved Luciano and I love him still.

PAOLO. Oh!

ANNA. I loved him. I loved him — do you hear? I loved him and I feel an

immense joy to say it here and you did not see that I was dying to say it — and when I saw you nearly stifling me with your ferocious curiosity, I said to myself: "It will out — it will out" . . . And it has come. I loved him, I love him and I have never loved any one in the world but him and I feel only remorse for my virtue. Now do you know?

PAOLO. Very well! [*Starts to go.*]

ANNA. Ah, no. Remain here — now you hear me. You wished that I speak, now I do. . . . It is I now who command you to stay. You must understand very well that after a scene such as this, everything is finished between us, so I must tell you everything. I listened to you and will listen to you again if you wish, but you also must listen to me. What have you ever done for me? What help have you given me? Have you known how to see when it was right that you should see? Have you known even how to suspect? Was it necessary that a man die. . . . Not even that! When you were not suffering, as you are suffering now, did you know how to see the way I suffered? You thought that my sorrow was for a dead relative! You did not understand that I was crazed; you slept next to me and yet you did not realize that the first few nights I bit the covers so as not to cry out. In a moment you realize all the facts. And what are these facts? That I, your wife for many years, have defended your peace in silence. I have fulfilled that which people call my duty. Then your curiosity is awakened and to make up for lost time you wish to violate my soul and penetrate down to its very depths. Ah — Paolo, no, no; one cannot do this. No, it will not help to know everything. One does not enter into the soul by the front door; one enters by stealth. You have tried to force an entrance; now you see there is nothing more inside for you.

PAOLO. No? You think you are right, eh? You are right — it is true — I admit that you are right. So I have never had your love, eh? You have said so; that I never had your love! Then what? You are right. Still — do you know what I shall do? I throw you out of my house!

ANNA [*happily*]. I go, I go, I go and I shall never come back! And do not beg me and do not come after me. I have no more strength to have pity, when I say good-by, I shall be as dead to you! [*Runs off into her room. Paolo stunned, stares after her awaiting for her return. Anna returns with her hat and cloak, crosses to exit.*]

PAOLO. No, Anna, no, no, no. Anna, no. For pity's sake wait! We are both mad. What will become of us? I need you. [*Paolo tries to get in her way to stop her.*] Do not go. I do not want you to — remain here. I was crazy — do not go, you will see that — for all my life — [*Anna tries to break away.*] No, for pity's sake — if you go — if you break from me — if you speak — I feel that this will be the end of everything! Remain! Remain, Anna! [*She breaks away.*]

ANNA. Good-by! [*Exits.*]

[*Curtain.*]

LOVE OF ONE'S NEIGHBOR

A Comedy

By Leonid Andreyev

Translated by Thomas Seltzer.

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LOVE OF ONE'S NEIGHBOR

A Comedy

By Leonid Andreyev

[Scene: *A wild place in the mountains.*

A man in an attitude of despair is standing on a tiny projection of a rock that rises almost sheer from the ground. How he got there it is not easy to say, but he cannot be reached either from above or below. Short ladders, ropes and sticks show that attempts have been made to save the unknown person, but without success.

It seems that the unhappy man has been in that desperate position a long time. A considerable crowd has already collected, extremely varied in composition. There are venders of cold drinks; there is a whole little bar behind which the bartender skips about out of breath and perspiring — he has more on his hands than he can attend to; there are peddlers selling picture postal cards, coral beads, souvenirs, and all sorts of trash. One fellow is stubbornly trying to dispose of a tortoise-shell comb, which is really not tortoise-shell. Tourists keep pouring in from all sides, attracted by the report that a catastrophe is impending — Englishmen, Americans, Germans, Russians, Frenchmen, Italians, etc., with all their peculiar national traits of character, manner and dress. Nearly all carry alpenstocks, field-glasses and cameras. The conversation is in different languages, all of which, for the convenience of the reader, we shall translate into English.

At the foot of the rock where the unknown man is to fall, two policemen are chasing the children away and partitioning off a space, drawing a rope around short stakes stuck in the ground. It is noisy and jolly.]

Policeman. Get away, you loafer! The man'll fall on your head and then your mother and father will be making a hullabaloo about it.

Boy. Will he fall here?

Policeman. Yes, here.

Boy. Suppose he drops farther?

Second Policeman. The boy is right. He may get desperate and jump, land beyond the rope and hit some people in the crowd. I guess he weighs at least about two hundred pounds.

First Policeman. Move on, move on, you! Where are you going? Is that your daughter, lady? Please take her away! The young man will soon fall.

Lady. Soon? Did you say he is going to fall soon? Oh, heavens, and my husband's not here!

Little Girl. He's in the café, mamma.

Lady [*desperately*]. Yes, of course. He's always in the café. Go call him, Nellie. Tell him the man will soon drop. Hurry! Hurry!

Voices. Waiter! — Garçon — Kellner — Three beers out here! — No beer? — What? — Say, that's a fine bar — We'll have some in a moment — Hurry up — Waiter! — Waiter! — Garçon!

First Policeman. Say, boy, you're here again?

Boy. I wanted to take the stone away.

Policeman. What for?

Boy. So he shouldn't get hurt so badly when he falls.

Second Policeman. The boy is right. We ought to remove the stone. We ought to clear the place altogether. Isn't there any sawdust or sand about?

[*Two English tourists enter. They look at the unknown man through field-glasses and exchange remarks.*]

First Tourist. He's young.

Second Tourist. How old?

First Tourist. Twenty-eight.

Second Tourist. Twenty-six. Fright has made him look older.

First Tourist. How much will you bet?

SECOND TOURIST. Ten to a hundred. Put it down.

FIRST TOURIST [*writing in his note-book. To the policeman*]. How did he get up there? Why don't they take him off?

POLICEMAN. They tried, but they couldn't. Our ladders are too short.

SECOND TOURIST. Has he been here long?

POLICEMAN. Two days.

FIRST TOURIST. Aha! He'll drop at night.

SECOND TOURIST. In two hours. A hundred to a hundred.

FIRST TOURIST. Put it down. [*He shouts to the man on the rock.*] How are you feeling? What? I can't hear you.

UNKNOWN MAN [*in a scarcely audible voice*]. Bad, very bad.

LADY. Oh, heavens, and my husband is not here!

LITTLE GIRL [*running in*]. Papa said he'll get here in plenty of time. He's playing chess.

LADY. Oh, heavens! Nellie, tell him he must come. I insist. But perhaps I had rather — Will he fall soon, Mr. Policeman? No? Nellie, you go. I'll stay here and keep the place for papa.

[*A tall, lanky woman of unusually independent and military appearance and a tourist dispute for the same place. The tourist, a short, quiet, rather weak man, feebly defends his rights; the woman is resolute and aggressive.*]

TOURIST. But, lady, it is my place. I have been standing here for two hours.

MILITARY WOMAN. What do I care how long you have been standing here. I want this place. Do you understand? It offers a good view, and that's just what I want. Do you understand?

TOURIST [*weakly*]. It's what I want, too.

MILITARY WOMAN. I beg your pardon, what do you know about these things anyway?

TOURIST. What knowledge is required? A man will fall. That's all.

MILITARY WOMAN [*mimicking*]. "A man will fall. That's all." Won't you have the goodness to tell me whether you have ever seen a man fall? No? Well, I did. Not one, but three. Two acrobats, one rope-walker and three aëronauts.

TOURIST. That makes six.

MILITARY WOMAN [*mimicking*] ."That makes six." Say, you are a mathematical prodigy. And did you ever see a tiger tear a woman to pieces in a zoo, right before your eyes? Eh? What? Yes, exactly. Now, I did — Please! Please!

[*The tourist steps aside, shrugging his shoulders with an air of injury, and the tall woman triumphantly takes possession of the stone she has won by her prowess. She sits down, spreading out around her her bag, handkerchief, peppermints, and medicine bottle, takes off her gloves and wipes her field-glass, glancing pleasantly on all around. Finally she turns to the lady who is waiting for her husband in the café.*]

MILITARY WOMAN [*amiably*]. You will tire yourself out, dear. Why don't you sit down?

LADY. Oh, my, don't talk about it. My legs are as stiff as that rock there.

MILITARY WOMAN. Men are so rude nowadays. They will never give their place to a woman. Have you brought peppermints with you?

LADY [*frightened*]. No. Why? Is it necessary?

MILITARY WOMAN. When you keep looking up a long time you are bound to get sick. Sure thing. Have you spirits of ammonia? No? Good gracious, how thoughtless! How will they bring you back to consciousness when he falls? You haven't any smelling salts either, I dare say. Of course not. Have you anybody to take care of you, seeing that you are so helpless yourself?

LADY [*frightened*]. I will tell my husband. He is in the café.

MILITARY WOMAN. Your husband is a brute.

POLICEMAN. Whose coat is this? Who threw this rag here?

BOY. It's mine. I spread my coat there so that he doesn't hurt himself so badly when he falls.

POLICEMAN. Take it away.

[*Two tourists armed with cameras contending for the same position.*]

FIRST TOURIST. I wanted this place.

SECOND TOURIST. You wanted it, but I got it.

FIRST TOURIST. You just came here. I have had this place for two days.

SECOND TOURIST. Then why did you go without even leaving your shadow?

FIRST TOURIST. I wasn't going to starve myself to death.

COMB-VENDER [*mysteriously*]. Tortoise-shell.

TOURIST [*savagely*]. Well?

VENDOR. Genuine tortoise-shell.

TOURIST. Go to the devil.

THIRD TOURIST, PHOTOGRAPHER. For heaven's sake, lady, you're sitting on my camera!

LITTLE LADY. Oh! Where is it?

TOURIST. Under you, under you, lady.

LITTLE LADY. I am so tired. What a wretched camera you have. I thought it felt uncomfortable and I was wondering why. Now I know; I am sitting on your camera.

TOURIST [*agonized*]. Lady!

LITTLE LADY. I thought it was a stone. I saw something lying there and I thought: A queer-looking stone; I wonder why it's so black. So that's what it was; it was your camera. I see.

TOURIST. [*agonized*]. Lady, for heaven's sake!

LITTLE LADY. Why is it so large, tell me. Cameras are small, but this one is so large. I swear I never had the faintest suspicion it was a camera. Can you take my picture? I would so much like to have my picture taken with the mountains here for a background, in this wonderful setting.

TOURIST. How can I take your picture if you are sitting on my camera?

LITTLE LADY [*jumping up, frightened*]. Is it possible? You don't say so. Why didn't you tell me so? Does it take pictures?

VOICES. Waiter, one beer! — What did you bring wine for? — I gave you my order long ago.— What will you have, sir? —One minute.— In a second. Waiter! —Waiter — Toothpicks! —

[*A fat tourist enters in haste, panting, surrounded by a numerous family.*]

TOURIST [*crying*]. Mary! Aleck! Jimmie! — Where is Mary? For God's sake! Where is Mary?

STUDENT [*dismally*]. Here she is, papa.

TOURIST. Where is she? Mary!

GIRL. Here I am, papa.

TOURIST. Where in the world are you? [*He turns around.*] Ah, there! What are you standing back of me for? Look, look! For goodness' sake, where are you looking?

GIRL [*dismally*]. I don't know, papa.

TOURIST. No, that's impossible. Imagine! She never once saw a lightning flash. She always keeps her eyes open as wide as onions, but the instant it flashes she closes them. So she never saw lightning, not once. Mary, you are missing it again. There it is! You see!

STUDENT. She sees, papa.

TOURIST. Keep an eye on her. [*Suddenly dropping into tone of profound pity.*] Ah, poor young man. Imagine! He'll fall from that high rock. Look, children, see how pale he is! That should be a lesson to you how dangerous climbing is.

STUDENT [*dismally*]. He won't fall today, papa!

SECOND GIRL. Papa, Mary has closed her eyes again.

FIRST STUDENT. Let us sit down, papa! Upon my word, he won't fall to-day. The porter told me so. I can't stand it any more. You've been dragging us about every day from morning till night visiting art galleries.

TOURIST. What's that? For whose benefit am I doing this? Do you think I enjoy spending my time with a dunce?

SECOND GIRL. Papa, Mary is blinking her eyes.

SECOND STUDENT. I can't stand it, either. I have terrible dreams. Yesterday I dreamed of garçons the whole night long.

TOURIST. Jimmie.

FIRST STUDENT. I have gotten so thin I am nothing but skin and bones. I can't stand it any more, father. I'd rather be a farmer, or tend pigs.

TOURIST. Aleck.

FIRST STUDENT. If he were really to fall — but it's a fake. You believe every lie told you! They all lie. Baedeker lies, too. Yes, your Baedeker lies!

MARY [*dismally*]. Papa, children, he's beginning to fall.

[*The man on the rock shouts something down into the crowd. There is general commotion. (Voices.)*

"Look, he's falling." Field-glasses are raised; the photographers, violently agitated, click their cameras; the policemen diligently clean the place where he is to fall.]

PHOTOGRAPHER. Oh, hang it! What is the matter with me? The devil! When a man's in a hurry —

SECOND PHOTOGRAPHER. Brother, your camera is closed.

PHOTOGRAPHER. The devil take it.

VOICES. Hush! He's getting ready to fall.— No, he's saying something.—No, he's falling.— Hush!

UNKNOWN MAN ON THE ROCK [*faintly*]. Save me! Save me!

TOURIST. Ah, poor young man. Mary, Jimmie, there's a tragedy for you. The sky is clear, the weather is beautiful, and has he to fall and be shattered to death? Can you realize how dreadful that is, Aleck?

STUDENT [*wearily*]. Yes, I can realize it.

TOURIST. Mary, can you realize it? Imagine. There is the sky. There are people enjoying themselves and partaking of refreshments. Everything is so nice and pleasant, and he has to fall. What a tragedy! Do you remember Hamlet?

SECOND GIRL [*prompting*]. Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, of Elsinore.

JAMES. Of Helsingfors, I know. Don't bother me, father!

MARY [*dismally*]. He dreamed about garçons all night long.

ALECK. Why don't you order sandwiches, father.

COMB-VENDER [*mysteriously*]. Tortoise-shell. Genuine tortoise-shell.

TOURIST [*credulously*]. Stolen?

VENDOR. Why, sir, the idea!

TOURIST [*angrily*]. Do you mean to tell me it's genuine if it isn't stolen? Go on. Not much.

MILITARY WOMAN [*amiably*]. Are all these your children?

TOURIST. Yes, madam. A father's duty. You see, they are protesting. It is the eternal conflict between fathers and children. Here is such a tragedy going on, such a heart-rending tragedy — Mary, you are blinking your eyes again.

MILITARY WOMAN. You are quite right. Children must be hardened to things. But why do you call this a terrible tragedy? Every roofer, when he falls, falls from a great height. But this here — what is it? A hundred, two hundred feet. I saw a man fall plumb from the sky.

TOURIST [*overwhelmed*]. You don't say?

ALECK. Children, listen. Plumb from the sky.

MILITARY WOMAN. Yes, yes. I saw an aëronaut drop from the clouds and go crash upon an iron roof.

TOURIST. How terrible!

MILITARY WOMAN. That's what I call a tragedy. It took two hours to bring me back to consciousness, and all that time they pumped water on me, the scoundrels. I was nearly drowned. From that day on I never step out of the door without taking spirits of ammonia with me.

[*Enter a strolling troop of Italian singers and musicians: a short, fat tenor, with a reddish beard and large, watery, stupidly dreamy eyes, singing with extraordinary sweetness; a skinny humpback with a jockey cap, and a screeching baritone; a bass who is also a mandolinist, looking like a bandit; a girl with a violin, closing her eyes when she plays, so that only the whites are seen. They take their stand and begin to sing: "Sul mare lucica — Santa Lucia, Santa Lucia —"*]

MARY [*dismally*]. Papa, children, look. He is beginning to wave his hands.

TOURIST. Is that the effect the music has upon him?

MILITARY WOMAN. Quite possible. Music usually goes with such things. But that'll make him fall sooner than he should. Musicians, go away from here! Go!

[*A tall tourist, with up-curled mustache, violently gesticulating, enters, followed by a small group attracted by curiosity.*]

TALL TOURIST. It's scandalous. Why don't they save him? Ladies and gentlemen, you all heard him shout: "Save me." Didn't you?

THE CURIOUS [*in chorus*]. Yes, yes, we heard him.

TALL TOURIST. There you are. I distinctly heard these words: "Save me! Why don't they save me?" It's scandalous. Policemen, policemen! Why don't

you save him? What are you doing there?

Policemen. We are cleaning up the place for him to fall.

Tall Tourist. That's a sensible thing to do, too. But why don't you save him? You ought to save him. If a man asks you to save him, it is absolutely essential to save him. Isn't it so, ladies and gentlemen?

The Curious [*in chorus*]. True, absolutely true. It is essential to save him.

Tall Tourist [*with heat*]. We are not heathens, we are Christians. We should love our neighbors. When a man asks to be saved every measure which the government has at its command should be taken to save him. Policemen, have you taken every measure?

Policeman. Every one!

Tall Tourist. Every one without exception? Gentleman, every measure has been taken. Listen, young man, every measure has been taken to save you. Did you hear?

Unknown Man [*in a scarcely audible voice*]. Save me!

Tall Tourist [*excitedly*]. Gentlemen, did you hear? He again asked to be saved. Policemen, did you hear?

One of the Curious [*timidly*]. It is my opinion that it is absolutely necessary to save him.

Tall Tourist. That's right. Exactly. Why, that's what I have been saying for the last two hours. Policemen, do you hear? It is scandalous.

One of the Curious [*a little bolder*]. It is my opinion that an appeal should be made to the highest authority.

The Rest [*in chorus*]. Yes, yes, a complaint should be made. It is scandalous. The government ought not to leave any of its citizens in danger. We all pay taxes. He must be saved.

Tall Tourist. Didn't I say so? Of course we must put up a complaint. Young man! Listen, young man. Do you pay taxes? What? I can't hear.

Tourist. Jimmie, Katie, listen! What a tragedy! Ah, the poor young man! He is soon to fall and they ask him to pay a domiciliary tax.

Kate [*the girl with glasses, pedantically*]. That can hardly be called a domicile, father. The meaning of domicile is —

James [*pinching her*]. Lickspittle.

Mary [*wearily*]. Papa, children, look! He's again beginning to fall.

[*There is excitement in the crowd, and again a bustling and shouting among the photographers.*]

Tall Tourst. We must hurry, ladies and gentlemen. He must be saved at any cost. Who's going with me?

The Curious [*in chorus*]. We are all going! We are all going?

Tall Tourist. Policemen, did you hear? Come, ladies and gentlemen!

[*They depart, fiercely gesticulating. The café grows more lively. The sound of clinking beer glasses and the clatter of steins is heard, and the beginning of a loud German song. The bartender, who has forgotten himself while talking to somebody, starts suddenly and runs off, looks up to the sky with a hopeless air and wipes the perspiration from his face with his napkin. Angry calls of Waiter! Waiter!*]

Unknown Man [*rather loudly*]. Can you let me have some soda water?

[*The waiter is startled, looks at the sky, glances at the man on the rock, and pretending not to have heard him, walks away.*]

Many Voices. Waiter! Beer!

Waiter. One moment, one moment!

[*Two drunken men come out from the café.*]

Lady. Ah, there is my husband. Come here quick.

Military Woman. A downright brute.

Drunken Man [*waving his hand to the unknown man*]. Say, is it very bad up there? Hey?

Unknown Man [*rather loudly*]. Yes, it's bad. I am sick and tired of it.

Drunken Man. Can't you get a drink?

Unknown Man. No, how can I?

Second Drunken Man. Say, what are you talking about? How can he get a drink? The man is about to die and you tempt him and try to get him excited. Listen, up there, we have been drinking your health right along. It won't hurt you, will it?

First Drunken Man. Ah, go on! What are you talking about? How can it hurt him? Why, it will only do him good. It will encourage him. Listen,

honest to God, we are very sorry for you, but don't mind us. We are going to the café to have another drink. Good-by.

SECOND DRUNKEN MAN. Look, what a crowd.

FIRST DRUNKEN MAN. Come, or he'll fall and then they'll close the café.

[*Enter a new crowd of tourists, a very elegant gentleman, the chief correspondent of European newspapers at their head. He is followed by an ecstatic whisper of respect and admiration. Many leave the café to look at him, and even the waiter turns slightly around, glances at him quickly, smiles happily and continues on his way, spilling something from his tray.*]

VOICES. The correspondent! The correspondent! Look!

LADY. Oh, my, and my husband is gone again!

TOURIST. Jimmie, Mary, Aleck, Katie, Charlie, look! This is the chief correspondent. Do you realize it? The very highest of all. Whatever he writes goes.

KATE. Mary, dear, again you are not looking.

ALECK. I wish you would order some sandwiches for us. I can't stand it any longer. A human being has to eat.

TOURIST [*ecstatically*]. What a tragedy! Katie, dear, can you realize it? Consider how awful. The weather is so beautiful, and the chief correspondent. Take out your note-book, Jimmie.

JAMES. I lost it, father.

CORRESPONDENT. Where is he?

VOICES [*obligingly*]. There, there he is. There! A little higher. Still higher! A little lower! No, higher!

CORRESPONDENT. If you please, if you please, ladies and gentlemen, I will find him myself. Oh, yes, there he is. Hm! What a situation!

TOURIST. Won't you have a chair?

CORRESPONDENT. Thank you. [*Sits down.*] Hm! What a situation! Very interesting. Very interesting, indeed! [*Whisks out his note-book; amiably to the photographers.*] Have you taken any pictures yet, gentlemen?

FIRST PHOTOGRAPHER. Yes, sir, certainly, certainly. We have photographed the place showing the general character of the locality —

SECOND PHOTOGRAPHER. The tragic situation of the young man —

CORRESPONDENT. Ye-es, very, very interesting.

TOURIST. Did you hear, Aleck? This smart man, the chief correspondent, says it's interesting, and you keep bothering about sandwiches. Dunce!

ALECK. May be he has had his dinner already.

CORRESPONDENT. Ladies and gentlemen, I beg you to be quiet.

OBLIGING VOICES. It is quieter in the café.

CORRESPONDENT [*shouts to the unknown man*]. Permit me to introduce myself. I am the chief correspondent of the European press. I have been sent here at the special request of the editors. I should like to ask you several questions concerning your situation. What is your name? What is your general position? How old are you? [*The unknown man mumbles something.*]

CORRESPONDENT [*a little puzzled*]. I can't hear a thing. Has he been that way all the time?

VOICE. Yes, it's impossible to hear a word he says.

CORRESPONDENT [*jotting down something in his note-book*]. Fine! Are you a bachelor? [*The unknown man mumbles.*]

CORRESPONDENT. I can't hear you. Are you married? Yes?

TOURIST. He said he was a bachelor.

SECOND TOURIST. No, he didn't. Of course, he's married.

CORRESPONDENT [*carelessly*]. You think so? All right. We'll put down, married. How many children have you? Can't hear. It seems to me he said three. Hm! Anyway, we'll put down five.

TOURIST. Oh, my, what a tragedy. Five children! Imagine!

MILITARY WOMAN. He is lying.

CORRESPONDENT [*shouting*]. How did you get into this position? What? I can't hear? Louder! Repeat. What did you say? [*Perplexed, to the crowd.*] What did he say? The fellow has a devilishly weak voice.

FIRST TOURIST. It seems to me he said that he lost his way.

SECOND TOURIST. No, he doesn't know himself how he got there.

VOICES. He was out hunting.— He was

climbing up the rocks.— No, no! He is simply a lunatic!

CORRESPONDENT. I beg your pardon, I beg your pardon, ladies and gentlemen! Anyway, he didn't drop from the sky. However — [*He quickly jots down in his note-book.*] Unhappy young man — suffering from childhood with attacks of lunacy.— The bright light of the full moon — the wild rocks.— Sleepy janitor — didn't notice —

FIRST TOURIST [*to the second, in a whisper*]. But it's a new moon now.

SECOND TOURIST. Go, what does a layman know about astronomy.

TOURIST [*ecstatically*]. Mary, pay attention to this! You have before you an ocular demonstration of the influence of the moon on living organisms. What a terrible tragedy to go out walking on a moonlit night and find suddenly that you have climbed to a place where it is impossible to climb down or be taken down.

CORRESPONDENT [*shouting*]. What feelings are you experiencing? I can't hear. Louder! Ah, so? Well, well! What a situation!

CROWD [*interested*]. Listen, listen! Let's hear what his feelings are. How terrible!

CORRESPONDENT [*writes in his note-book, tossing out detached remarks*]. Mortal terror, numbs his limbs.— A cold shiver goes down his spinal column.— No hope. — Before his mental vision rises a picture of family bliss: Wife making sandwiches; his five children innocently lisping their love.— Grandma in the arm-chair with a tube to her ear, that is, grandpa in the arm-chair, with a tube to *his* ear and grandma.— Deeply moved by the sympathy of the public.— His last wish before his death that the words he uttered with his last breath should be published in our newspapers —

MILITARY WOMAN [*indignantly*]. My! He lies like a salesman.

MARY [*wearily*]. Papa, children, look, he is starting to fall again.

TOURIST [*angrily*]. Don't bother me. Such a tragedy is unfolding itself right before your very eyes — and you — What are you making such big eyes for again?

CORRESPONDENT [*shouting*]. Hold on fast. That's it! My last question: What message do you wish to leave for your fellow citizens before you depart for the better world?

UNKNOWN MAN. That they may all go to the devil.

CORRESPONDENT. What? Hm, yes — [*He writes quickly.*] Ardent love — is a stanch opponent of the law granting equal rights to negroes. His last words: "Let the black niggers —"

PASTOR [*out of breath, pushing through the crowd*]. Where is he? Ah, where is he? Ah, there! Poor young man. Has there been no clergyman here yet? No? Thank you. Am I the first?

CORRESPONDENT [*writes*]. A touching dramatic moment.— A minister has arrived.— All are trembling on the verge of suspense. Many are shedding tears —

PASTOR. Excuse me, excuse me! Ladies and gentlemen, a lost soul wishes to make its peace with God — [*He shouts.*] My son, don't you wish to make your peace with God? Confess your sins to me. I will grant you remission at once! What? I cannot hear?

CORRESPONDENT [*writes*]. The air is shaken with the people's groans. The minister of the church exhorts the criminal, that is, the unfortunate man, in touching language.— The unfortunate creature with tears in his eyes thanks him in a faint voice —

UNKNOWN MAN [*faintly*]. If you won't go away I will jump on your head. I weigh three hundred pounds. [*All jump away frightened behind each other.*]

VOICES. He is falling! He is falling!

TOURIST [*agitatedly*]. Mary, Aleck, Jimmie.

POLICEMAN [*energetically*]. Clear the place, please! Move on!

LADY. Nellie, go quick and tell your father he is falling.

PHOTOGRAPHER [*in despair*]. Oh my, I am out of films [*tosses madly about, looking pitifully at the unknown man*]. One minute, I'll go and get them. I have some in my overcoat pocket over there. [*He walks a short distance, keeping his eyes fixed on the unknown man, and then returns.*] I can't, I am afraid I'll miss it. Good heavens! They are over there in my overcoat. Just one minute, please. I'll fetch them right away. What a fix.

PASTOR. Hurry, my friend. Pull yourself together and try to hold out long

enough to tell me at least your principal sins. You needn't mention the lesser ones.

TOURIST. What a tragedy?

CORRESPONDENT [*writes*]. The criminal, that is, the unhappy man, makes a public confession and does penance. Terrible secrets revealed. He is a bank robber — blew up safes.

TOURIST [*credulously*]. The scoundrel.

PASTOR [*shouts*]. In the first place, have you killed? Secondly, have you stolen? Thirdly, have you committed adultery?

TOURIST. Mary, Jimmie, Katie, Aleck, Charlie, close your ears.

CORRESPONDENT [*writing*]. Tremendous excitement in the crowd.— Shouts of indignation.

PASTOR [*hurriedly*]. Fourthly, have you blasphemed? Fifthly, have you coveted your neighbor's ass, his ox, his slave, his wife? Sixthly —

PHOTOGRAPHER [*alarmed*]. Ladies and gentlemen, an ass!

SECOND PHOTOGRAPHER. Where? I can't see it!

PHOTOGRAPHER [*calmed*]. I thought I heard it.

PASTOR. I congratulate you, my son! I congratulate you! You have made your peace with God. Now you may rest easy — Oh, God, what do I see? The Salvation Army! Policeman, chase them away!

[*Enter a Salvation Army band, men and women in uniforms. There are only three instruments, a drum, a violin and a piercingly shrill trumpet.*]

SALVATION ARMY MAN [*frantically beating his drum and shouting in a nasal voice*]. Brethren and sisters —

PASTOR [*shouting even louder in a still more nasal voice in an effort to drown the other's*]. He has already confessed. Bear witness, ladies and gentlemen, that he has confessed and made his peace with heaven.

SALVATION ARMY WOMAN [*climbing on a rock and shrieking*]. I once wandered in the dark just as this sinner and I lived a bad life and was a drunkard, but when the light of truth —

A VOICE. Why, she is drunk now.

PASTOR. Policeman, didn't he confess and make his peace with heaven?

[*The Salvation Army man continues to beat his drum frantically; the rest begin to drawl a song. Shouts, laughter, whistling. Singing in the café, and calls of "Waiter!" in all languages. The bewildered policemen tear themselves away from the pastor, who is pulling them somewhere; the photographers turn and twist about as if the seats were burning under them. An English lady comes riding in on a donkey, who, stopping suddenly, sprawls out his legs and refuses to go farther, adding his noise to the rest. Gradually the noise subsides. The Salvation Army band solemnly withdraws, and the pastor, waving his hands, follows them.*]

FIRST ENGLISH TOURIST [*to the other*]. How impolite! This crowd doesn't know how to behave itself.

SECOND ENGLISH TOURIST. Come, let's go away from here.

FIRST ENGLISH TOURIST. One minute. [*He shouts.*] Listen, won't you hurry up and fall?

SECOND ENGLISH TOURIST. What are you saying, Sir William?

FIRST ENGLISH TOURIST [*shouting*]. Don't you see that's what they are waiting for? As a gentleman you should grant them this pleasure and so escape the humiliation of undergoing tortures before this mob.

SECOND ENGLISH TOURIST. Sir William.

TOURIST [*ecstatically*]. See? It's true. Aleck, Jimmie, it's true. What a tragedy!

SEVERAL TOURISTS [*going for the Englishman*]. How dare you?

FIRST ENGLISH TOURIST [*shoving them aside*]. Hurry up and fall! Do you hear? If you haven't the backbone I'll help you out with a pistol shot.

VOICES. That red-haired devil has gone clear out of his mind.

POLICEMAN [*seizing the Englishman's hand*]. You have no right to do it, it's against the law. I'll arrest you.

SOME TOURISTS. A barbarous nation!

[*The unknown man shouts something. Excitement below.*]

VOICES. Hear, hear, hear!

UNKNOWN MAN [*aloud*]. Take that jackass away to the devil. He wants to

shoot me. And tell the boss that I can't stand it any longer.

Voices. What's that? What boss? He is losing his mind, the poor man.

Tourist. Aleck! Mary! This is a mad scene. Jimmie, you remember Hamlet? Quick.

Unknown Man [*angrily*]. Tell him my spinal column is broken.

Mary [*wearily*]. Papa, children, he's beginning to kick with his legs.

Kate. Is that what is called convulsions, papa?

Tourist [*rapturously*]. I don't know. I think it is. What a tragedy?

Aleck [*glumly*]. You fool! You keep cramming and cramming and you don't know that the right name for that is agony. And you wear eyeglasses, too. I can't bear it any longer, papa.

Tourist. Think of it, children. A man is about to fall down to his death and he is bothering about his spinal column.

[*There is a noise. A man in a white vest, very much frightened, enters, almost dragged by angry tourists. He smiles, bows on all sides, stretches out his arms, now running forward as he is pushed, now trying to escape in the crowd, but is seized and pulled again.*]

Voices. A bare-faced deception! It is an outrage. Policeman, policeman, he must be taught a lesson!

Other Voices. What is it? What deception? What is it all about? They have caught a thief!

The Man in the White Vest [*bowing and smiling*]. It's a joke, ladies and gentlemen, a joke, that's all. The people were bored, so I wanted to provide a little amusement for them.

Unknown Man [*angrily*]. Boss!

The Man in the White Vest. Wait a while, wait a while.

Unknown Man. Do you expect me to stay here until the Second Advent? The agreement was till twelve o'clock. What time is it now?

Tall Tourist [*indignantly*]. Do you hear, ladies and gentlemen? This scoundrel, this man here in the white vest hired that other scoundrel up there and just simply tied him to the rock.

Voices. Is he tied?

Tall Tourist. Yes, he is tied and he can't fall. We are excited and worrying, but he couldn't fall even if he tried.

Unknown Man. What else do you want? Do you think I am going to break my neck for your measly ten dollars? Boss, I can't stand it any more. One man wanted to shoot me. The pastor preached me for two hours. This is not in the agreement.

Aleck. Father, I told you that Baedeker lies. You believe everything anybody tells you and drag us about without eating.

Man in the White Vest. The people were bored. My only desire was to amuse the people.

Military Woman. What is the matter? I don't understand a thing. Why isn't he going to fall? Who, then, is going to fall?

Tourist. I don't understand a thing either. Of course he's got to fall!

James. You never understand anything, father. Weren't you told that he's tied to the rock?

Aleck. You can't convince him. He loves every Baedeker more than his own children.

James. A nice father!

Tourist. Silence!

Military Woman. What is the matter? He must fall.

Tall Tourist. The idea! What a deception. You'll have to explain this.

Man in the White Vest. The people were bored. Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen, but wishing to accommodate you — give you a few hours of pleasant excitement — elevate your spirits — inspire you with altruistic sentiments —

Englishman. Is the café yours?

Man in the White Vest. Yes.

Englishman. And is the hotel below also yours?

Gentleman. Yes. The people were bored —

Correspondent [*writing*]. The proprietor of the café, desiring to increase his profits from the sale of alcoholic beverages, exploits the best human sentiments.— The people's indignation —

Unknown Man [*angrily*]. Boss, will you have me taken off at once or won't you?

Hotel Keeper. What do you want up there? Aren't you satisfied? Didn't I have you taken off at night?

UNKNOWN MAN. Well, I should say so. You think I'd be hanging here nights, too!

HOTEL OWNER. Then you can stand it a few minutes longer. The people are bored —

TALL TOURIST. Say, have you any idea of what you have done? Do you realize the enormity of it? You are scoundrels, who for your own sordid personal ends have impiously exploited the finest human sentiment, love of one's neighbor. You have caused us to undergo fear and suffering. You have poisoned our hearts with pity. And now, what is the upshot of it all? The upshot is that this scamp, your vile accomplice, is bound to the rock and not only will he not fall as everybody expects, but he *can't.*

MILITARY WOMAN. What is the matter? He has got to fall.

TOURIST. Policeman! Policeman!

[*The pastor enters, out of breath.*]

PASTOR. What? Is he still living? Oh, there he is! What fakirs those Salvationists are.

VOICES. Don't you know that he is bound?

PASTOR. Bound! Bound to what? To life? Well, we are all bound to life until death snaps the cord. But whether he is bound or not bound, I reconciled him with heaven, and that's enough. But those fakirs —

TOURIST. Policeman! Policeman, you must draw up an official report. There is no way out of it.

MILITARY WOMAN [*going for the hotel owner*]. I will not allow myself to be fooled. I saw an aëronaut drop from the clouds and go crash upon a roof. I saw a tiger tear a woman to pieces —

PHOTOGRAPHER. I spoiled three films photographing that scamp. You will have to answer for this, sir. I will hold you responsible.

TOURIST. An official report! An official report! Such a bare-faced deception. Mary, Jimmie, Aleck, Charlie, call a policeman.

HOTEL KEEPER [*drawing back, in despair*]. But, I can't make him fall if he doesn't want to. I did everything in my power, ladies and gentlemen!

MILITARY WOMAN. I will not allow it.

HOTEL KEEPER. Excuse me. I promise you on my word of honor that the next time he will fall. But he doesn't want to, to-day.

UNKNOWN MAN. What's that? What did you say about the next time?

HOTEL KEEPER. You shut up there!

UNKNOWN MAN. For ten dollars?

PASTOR. Pray, what impudence! I just made his peace with heaven when he was in danger of his life. You have heard him threatening to fall on my head, haven't you? And still he is dissatisfied. Adulterer, thief, murderer, coveter of your neighbor's ass —

PHOTOGRAPHER. Ladies and gentlemen, an ass!

SECOND PHOTOGRAPHER. Where, where is an ass?

PHOTOGRAPHER [*calmed*]. I thought I heard one.

SECOND PHOTOGRAPHER. It is you who are an ass. I have become cross-eyed on account of your shouting: "An ass! An ass!"

MARY [*wearily*]. Papa, children, look! A policeman is coming.

[*Excitement and noise. On one side a crowd pulling a policeman, on the other the hotel keeper; both keep crying: "Excuse me! Excuse me!"*]

TOURIST. Policeman, there he is, the fakir, the swindler.

PASTOR. Policeman, there he is, the adulterer, the murderer, the coveter of his neighbor's ass —

POLICEMAN. Excuse me, excuse me, ladies and gentlemen. We will bring him to his senses in short order and make him confess.

HOTEL KEEPER. I can't make him fall if he doesn't want to.

POLICEMAN. Hey, you, young man out there! Can you fall or can't you? Confess!

UNKNOWN MAN [*sullenly*]. I don't want to fall!

VOICES. Aha, he has confessed. What a scoundrel!

TALL TOURIST. Write down what I dictate, policeman — "Desiring — for the sake of gain to exploit the sentiment of love of one's neighbor — the sacred feeling — a-a-a —"

TOURIST. Listen, children, they are drawing up an official report. What exquisite choice of language!

TALL TOURIST. The sacred feeling which —

POLICEMAN [*writing with painful effort, his tongue stuck out*]. Love of one's neighbor — the sacred feeling which —

MARY [*wearily*]. Papa, children, look! An advertisement is coming.

[*Enter musicians with trumpets and drums, a man at their head carrying on a long pole a huge placard with the picture of an absolutely bald head, and printed underneath: "I was bald."*]

UNKNOWN MAN. Too late. They are drawing up a report here. You had better skidoo!

THE MAN CARRYING THE POLE [*stopping and speaking in a loud voice*]. I had been bald from the day of my birth and for a long time thereafter. That miserable growth, which in my tenth year covered my scalp was more like wool than real hair. When I was married my skull was as bare as a pillow and my young bride —

TOURIST. What a tragedy! Newly married and with such a head! Can you realize how dreadful that is, children?

[*All listen with interest, even the policeman stopping in his arduous task and inclining his ear with his pen in his hand.*]

THE MAN CARRYING THE POLE [*solemnly*]. And the time came when my matrimonial happiness literally hung by a hair. All the medicines recommended by quacks to make my hair grow —

TOURIST. Your note-book, Jimmie.

MILITARY WOMAN. But when is he going to fall?

HOTEL KEEPER [*amiably*]. The next time, lady, the next time. I won't tie him so hard — you understand?

[*Curtain.*]

THE BOOR

A Comedy

By Anton Tchekoff

Translated by Hilmar Baukage.

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CHARACTERS

Helena Ivanovna Popov [*a young widow, mistress of a country estate*].
Grigorji Stepanovitch Smirnov [*proprietor of a country estate*].
Luka [*servant of Mrs. Popov*].
A Gardener.
A Coachman.
Several Workmen.

Place: *The Estate of Mrs. Popov.*
Time: *The Present.*
[*The stage shows an elegantly furnished reception room.*]

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THE BOOR

A Comedy

By Anton Tchekoff

[*Mrs. Popov discovered in deep mourning, sitting upon a sofa, gazing steadfastly at a photograph. Luka is also present.*]

Luka. It isn't right, ma'am — You're wearing yourself out! The maid and the cook have gone looking for berries, everything that breathes is enjoying life, even the cat knows how to be happy — slips about the courtyard and catches birds; but you hide yourself here in the house as though you were in a cloister and have no pleasures — Yes, truly, by actual reckoning you haven't left this house for a whole year.

Mrs. Popov. And I shall never leave it — why should I? My life is over. He lies in his grave, and I have buried myself within these four walls. We are both dead.

Luka. There you are again! It's too awful to listen to, so it is! Nikolai Michailovitch is dead, it was the will of the Lord and the Lord has given him eternal peace. You have grieved over it and that ought to be enough. Now it's time to stop. One can't weep and wear mourning forever! My wife died a few years ago, too. I grieved for her, I wept a whole month — and then it was over. Must one be forever singing lamentations? That would be more than your husband was worth! [*He sighs.*] You have forgotten all your neighbors. You don't go out and you won't receive any one. We live, — you'll pardon me — like the spiders, and the good light of day we never see. All the livery is eaten by the mice — As though there weren't any more nice people in the world! But the whole neighborhood is full of gentlefolk. In Riblov the regiment is stationed, officers — simply beautiful! One can't see enough of them! Every Friday a ball, and military music every day. Oh, my dear, dear ma'am, young and pretty as you are, if you'd only let your spirits live! Beauty can't last forever. When ten short years are over, then you'll be glad enough to go out a bit! And meet the officers — and then it'll be too late.

Mrs. Popov [*resolutely*]. Please, don't speak of these things to me again. You know very well that since the death of Nikolai Michailovitch my life is absolutely nothing to me. You think I live, but it only seems that I live. Do you understand? Oh, that his departed soul may see how I love him — Oh, I know, it's no secret to you; he was often unjust towards me, cruel and — he wasn't faithful, but I shall be faithful to the grave and prove to him how I am able to love. There, in the beyond, he'll find me the same, as I was until his death.

Luka. What is the use of all these words? When you'd so much rather go walking in the garden or order Tobby or Welikan harnessed to the trap, and visit the neighbors.

Mrs. Popov [*weeping*]. Oh!

Luka. Madam, dear, dear Madam, what is it? In heaven's name?

Mrs. Popov. He loved Tobby so! He always took him when he drove to the Kortschagins or the Vlassovs. What a wonderful horseman he was! How fine he looked! When he pulled at the reins with all his might! Tobby, Tobby, give him an extra measure of oats to-day!

Luka. Yes, ma'am.

[*A bell rings loudly.*]

Mrs. Popov [*shudders*]. What's that? Say that I am receiving no one.

Luka. Yes, ma'am. [*He goes out center.*]

Mrs. Popov [*gazing at the photograph*]. You shall see, Nikol, how I can love and forgive — My love will die only with me — when my poor heart stops beating. [*She smiles through her tears.*] And

aren't you ashamed? I have been a good, true wife, I have imprisoned myself and I shall remain true until the grave, and you — you — you're not ashamed of yourself, my dear monster! Betrayed me, quarreled with me, left me alone for weeks —

[*Luka enters in great excitement.*]

LUKA. Oh, ma'am, some one is asking for you, insists on seeing you —

MRS POPOV. You told him that since my husband's death I receive no one?

LUKA. I said so, but he won't listen, he says that it is a pressing matter.

MRS. POPOV. I — re — ceive — no — one!

LUKA. I told him that, but he's a wild-man, he swore and pushed himself into the room — he's in the dining room now.

MRS. POPOV [*excitedly*]. Good. Show him in. What an intruder!

[*Luka goes out center.*]

MRS. POPOV. What a bore people are! What can they want with me? Why do they disturb my peace? [*She sighs.*] Yes, it is clear I must go to a cloister. [*Meditatively.*] Yes, in a cloister —

[*Smirnov enters followed by Luka.*]

SMIRNOV [*to Luka*]. Fool, you make too much noise! You're an ass! [*Discovering Mrs. Popov — politely.*] Madam, I have the honor to introduce myself; Lieutenant in the Artillery, retired, country gentleman, Grigorji Stepanovitch Smirnov! I'm forced to bother you about an exceedingly important matter.

MRS. POPOV [*without offering her hand*]. What is it you wish?

SMIRNOV. Your deceased husband, with whom I had the honor to be acquainted, left me two notes amounting to about twelve hundred rubles. Inasmuch as I have to meet the interest to-morrow on a loan from the Agrarian Bank, I should like to request, madam, that you pay me the money to-day.

MRS. POPOV. Twelve hundred — and for what was my husband indebted to you?

SMIRNOV. He had bought oats from me.

MRS. POPOV [*with a sigh to Luka*]. Don't forget to have Tobby given an extra measure of oats.

[*Luka goes out.*]

MRS. POPOV [*to Smirnov*]. If Nikolai Michailovitch is indebted to you, I will of course pay you, but, I am sorry, I haven't the money to-day. To-morrow my manager will be back from the city and I shall notify him to pay you what is due you, but until then I cannot satisfy your request. Furthermore to-day it is just seven months since the death of my husband and I am not in the mood to discuss money matters.

SMIRNOV. And I am in the mood to fly up the chimney with my feet in the air if I can't lay hands on that interest to-morrow. They'll sequestrate my estate!

MRS. POPOV. Day after to-morrow you will receive the money.

SMIRNOV. I don't need the money day after to-morrow, I need it to-day.

MRS. POPOV. I'm sorry I can't pay you to-day.

SMIRNOV. And I can't wait until day after to-morrow.

MRS. POPOV. But what can I do if I haven't it?

SMIRNOV. So you can't pay?

MRS. POPOV. I cannot.

SMIRNOV. Hm. — Is that your last word?

MRS. POPOV. My last.

SMIRNOV. Absolutely?

MRS. POPOV. Absolutely.

SMIRNOV. Thank you. We shan't forget it. [*He shrugs his shoulders.*] And then they expect me to stand for all that. The toll gatherer just now met me in the road and asked, why are you always worrying, Grigorji Stepanovitch? Why in heaven's name shouldn't I worry? I need money, I feel the knife at my throat. Yesterday morning I left my house in the early dawn and called on all my debtors. If even one of them had paid his debt! I worked the skin off my fingers! The devil knows in what sort of Jew-inn I slept, in a room with a barrel of brandy! And now at last I come here, seventy versts from home, hope for a little money and all you give me is moods. Why shouldn't I worry?

MRS. POPOV. I thought I made it plain to you that my manager will return from town and then you will get your money?

SMIRNOV. I did not come to see the manager, I came to see you. What the devil — pardon the language — do I care for your manager?

MRS. POPOV. Really, sir, I am neither

used to such language nor such manners. I shan't listen to you any further. [*She goes out left.*]

SMIRNOV. What can one say to that? Moods! Seven months since her husband died! And do I have to pay the interest or not? I repeat the question, have I to pay the interest or not? Well yes, the husband is dead and all that, the manager is — the devil with him — traveling somewhere. Now tell me, what am I to do? Shall I run away from my creditors in a balloon? Or push my head into a stone wall? If I call on Grusdev he chooses to be "not at home," Iroschevitch has simply hidden himself, I have quarreled with Kurzin until I came near throwing him out of the window, Masutov is ill and this one in here has — moods! Not one of the crew will pay up! And all because I've spoiled them all, because I'm an old whiner, an old dish rag! I'm too tender hearted with them. But you wait! I'll show you! I permit nobody to play tricks with me, the devil with 'em all! I'll stay here and not budge from the spot until she pays! Brrr! How angry I am, how terribly angry I am! Every tendon is trembling with anger and I can hardly breathe — ah, I'm even growing ill. [*He calls out.*] Servant!

[*Luka enters.*]

LUKA. What is it you wish?

SMIRNOV. Bring me Kvas or water! [*Luka goes out.*] Well, what can we do? She hasn't it on hand? What sort of logic is that? A fellow stands with the knife at his throat, he needs money, he is just at the point of hanging himself, and she won't pay because she isn't in the mood to discuss money matters. See! Pure woman's logic. That's why I never liked to talk to women and why I hate to do it now. I would rather sit on a powder barrel than talk with a woman. Brr! — I'm getting cold as ice, this affair has made me so angry. I only need to see such a romantic creature from the distance to get so angry that I have cramps in the calves? It's enough to make one yell for help!

[*Enter Luka.*]

LUKA [*hands him water*]. Madam is ill and is not receiving.

SMIRNOV. March! [*Luka goes out.*] Ill and isn't receiving! All right, it isn't necessary. I won't receive either. I'll sit here and stay until you bring that money. If you're ill a week, I'll sit here a week. If you're ill a year, I'll sit here a year. As heaven is a witness I'll get my money. You don't disturb me with your mourning — or with your dimples. We know these dimples! [*He calls out the window.*] Simon, unharness. We aren't going to leave right away. I am going to stay here. Tell them in the stable to give the horses some oats. The left horse has twisted the bridle again. [*Imitating him.*] Stop. I'll show you how. Stop. [*Leaves window.*] It's awful. Unbearable heat, no money, didn't sleep well last night and now mourning-dresses with moods. My head aches, perhaps I ought to have a drink. Ye-s, I must have a dring. [*Calling.*] Servant!

LUKA. What do you wish?

SMIRNOV. A little drink. [*Luka goes out. Smirnov sits down and looks at his clothes.*] Ugh, a fine figure! No use denying that. Dust, dirty boots, unwashed, uncombed, straw on my vest — the lady probably took me for a highwayman. [*He yawns.*] *It* was a little impolite to come into a reception room with such clothes. Oh well, no harm done. I'm not here as guest. I'm a creditor. And there is no special costume for creditors.

LUKA [*entering with glass*]. You take a great deal of liberty, sir.

SMIRNOV [*angrily*]. What?

LUKA. I — I — I just —

SMIRNOV. Whom are you talking to? Keep quiet.

LUKA [*angrily*]. Nice mess! This fellow won't leave! [*He goes out.*]

SMIRNOV. Lord, how angry I am! Angry enough to throw mud at the whole world! I even feel ill — servant!

[*Mrs. Popov comes in with downcast eyes.*]

MRS. POPOV. Sir, in my solitude I have become unaccustomed to the human voice and I cannot stand the sound of loud talking. I beg of you, please to cease disturbing my quiet.

SMIRNOV. Pay me my money and I'll leave.

MRS. POPOV. I told you once plainly in your native tongue that I haven't the money on hand; wait until day after tomorrow.

SMIRNOV. And I also have the honor of informing you in your native tongue that I need the money, not day after to-morrow, but to-day. If you don't pay me to-day I shall have to hang myself to-morrow.

MRS. POPOV. But what can I do when I haven't the money? How strange!

SMIRNOV. So you are not going to pay immediately? You're not?

MRS. POPOV. I can't.

SMIRNOV. Then I'll sit here and stay until I get the money. [*He sits.*] You will pay day after to-morrow? Excellent! Here I stay until day after to-morrow. [*Jumps up.*] I ask you: do I have to pay that interest to-morrow or not? Or do you think I'm joking?

MRS. POPOV. Sir, I beg of you, don't scream! This is not a stable.

SMIRNOV. I'm not asking you about a stable, I'm asking you whether I have to pay that interest to-morrow or not?

MRS. POPOV. You have no idea how a lady should be treated.

SMIRNOV. Oh, yes, I know how to treat ladies.

MRS. POPOV. No, you don't. You are an ill-bred, vulgar person — respectable people don't speak so with ladies.

SMIRNOV. Oh, how remarkable! How do you want one to speak with you? In French perhaps. Madame, je vous prie — how fortunate I am that you won't pay me my money! Pardon me for having disturbed you. What beautiful weather we are having to-day. And how this mourning becomes you. [*He makes an ironic bow.*]

MRS. POPOV. Not at all funny — vulgar!

SMIRNOV [*imitating her*]. Not at all funny — vulgar. I don't understand how to behave in the company of ladies. Madam, in the course of my life I have seen more women than you have sparrows. Three times I have fought duels over women, twelve women I threw over and nine threw me over. There was a time when I played the fool, used honeyed language, bows and scrapings. I loved, suffered, sighed to the moon, melted in love's torments. I loved passionately, I loved to madness, in every key, chattered like a magpie on emancipation, sacrificed half my fortune in the tender passion until now the devil knows I've had enough of it. Your obedient servant will let you lead him around by the nose no more. Enough! Black eyes, passionate eyes, coral lips, dimples in cheeks, moonlight whispers, soft, modest sighs,— for all that, madam, I wouldn't pay a copper cent. I am not speaking of the present company but of women in general; from the tiniest to the greatest, they are all conceited, hypocritical, chattering, odious, deceitful from top to toe; vain, petty, cruel with a maddening logic and [*he strikes his forehead*] in this respect, please excuse my frankness, but one sparrow is worth ten of the aforementioned petticoat-philosophers. When one sees one of the romantic creatures before him he imagines that he is looking at some holy being, so wonderful that its one breath could dissolve him in a sea of a thousand charms and delights — but if one looks into the soul — it's nothing but a common crocodile. [*He seizes the arm-chair and breaks it in two.*] But the worst of all is that this crocodile imagines that it is a chef-d'oeuvre and that it has a monopoly on all the tender passions. May the devil hang me upside down if there is anything to love about a woman! When she is in love all she knows is how to complain and shed tears. If the man suffers and makes sacrifices she trails her train about and tries to lead him around by the nose. You have the misfortune to be a woman and you naturally know woman's nature; tell me on your honor, have you ever in your life seen a woman who was really true and faithful? You never saw one. Only the old and the deformed are true and faithful. It's easier to find a cat with horns or a white woodcock than a faithful woman.

MRS. POPOV. But just allow me to ask, who is true and faithful in love? The man, perhaps?

SMIRNOV. Yes, indeed! The man!

MRS. POPOV. The man! [*She laughs ironically.*] The man is true and faithful in love! Well, that is something new. [*She laughs bitterly.*] How can you make such a statement? Men true and faithful! As long as we have gone as far as we have I may as well say that of all the men I have known my husband was the best — I loved him passionately with all my soul, as only a young, sensible woman may love, I gave him my youth,

my happiness, my fortune, my life. I worshiped him like a heathen. And what happened? This best of all men betrayed me right and left in every possible fashion. After his death I found his desk filled with a collection of love letters. While he was alive he left me alone for months — it is horrible to even think about it — he made love to other women in my very presence, he wasted my money and made fun of my feelings,— and in spite of all that I trusted him and was true to him. And more than that, he is dead and I am still true to him. I have buried myself within these four walls and I shall wear this mourning to my grave.

SMIRNOV [*laughing disrespectfully*]. Mourning! What on earth do you take me for? As if I didn't know why you wore this black domino and why you buried yourself within these four walls. As if I didn't know! Such a secret! So romantic! Some knight will pass the castle, will gaze up at the windows and think to himself: "Here dwells the mysterious Tamara who, for love of her husband, has buried herself within four walls." Oh, I understand the art!

MRS. POPOV [*springing up*]. What? What do you mean by saying such things to me?

SMIRNOV. You have buried yourself alive, but meanwhile you have not forgotten to powder your nose!

MRS. POPOV. How dare you speak to me so?

SMIRNOV. Don't scream at me, please, I'm not the manager. Just let me call things by their right names. I am not a woman and I am accustomed to speak out what I think. So please don't scream.

MRS. POPOV. I'm not screaming. It is you who are doing the screaming. Please leave me, I beg of you.

SMIRNOV. Pay me my money and I'll leave.

MRS. POPOV. I won't give you the money.

SMIRNOV. You won't? You won't give me my money?

MRS. POPOV. I don't care what you do. You won't get a kopeck! Leave me alone.

SMIRNOV. As I haven't the pleasure of being either your husband or your fiancé please don't make a scene. [*He sits down.*] I can't stand it.

MRS. POPOV [*breathing hard*]. You are going to sit down?

SMIRNOV. I already have.

MRS. POPOV. Kindly leave the house!

SMIRNOV. Give me the money.

MRS. POPOV. I don't care to speak with impudent men. Leave! [*Pause.*] You aren't going?

SMIRNOV. No.

MRS. POPOV. No?

SMIRNOV. No.

MRS. POPOV. Very well. [*She rings the bell.*]

[*Enter Luka.*]

MRS. POPOV. Luka, show the gentleman out.

LUKA [*going to Smirnov*]. Sir, why don't you leave when you are ordered? What do you want —

SMIRNOV [*jumping up*]. Whom do you think you are talking to? I'll grind you to powder.

LUKA [*puts his hand to his heart*]. Good Lord! [*He drops into a chair.*] Oh, I'm ill, I can't breathe!

MRS. POPOV. Where is Dascha? [*Calling.*] Dascha! Pelageja! Dascha! [*She rings.*]

LUKA. They're all gone! I'm ill. Water!

MRS. POPOV [*to Smirnov*]. Leave! Get out!

SMIRNOV. Kindly be a little more polite!

MRS. POPOV [*striking her fists and stamping her feet*]. You are vulgar! You're a boor! A monster!

SMIRNOV. Wh — at did you say?

MRS. POPOV. I said you were a boor, a monster!

SMIRNOV [*steps toward her quickly*]. Permit me to ask what right you have to insult me?

MRS. POPOV. Yes, I insult you. What of it? Do you think I am afraid of you?

SMIRNOV. And you think that because you are a romantic creature that you can insult me without being punished? I challenge you! Now you have it.

LUKA. Merciful heaven! Water!

SMIRNOV. We'll have a duel.

MRS. POPOV. Do you think because you have big fists and a steer's neck that I am afraid of you?

SMIRNOV. That is the limit! I allow no one to insult me and I make no ex-

ception because you are a woman, one of the "weaker sex"!

MRS. POPOV [*trying to cry him down*]. Boor, boor, boor!

SMIRNOV. It is high time to do away with the old superstition that it is only a man who is forced to give satisfaction. If there is equity at all let there be equity in all things. There's a limit!

MRS. POPOV. You wish to fight a duel? Very well.

SMIRNOV. Immediately.

MRS. POPOV. Immediately. My husband had pistols. I'll bring them. [*She hurries away, then turns.*] Oh, what a pleasure it will be to put a bullet in your impudent head. The devil take you! [*She goes out.*]

SMIRNOV. I'll shoot her down! I'm no fledgling, no sentimental, young puppy. For me there is no weaker sex.

LUKA. Oh, sir. [*Falls to his knees.*] Have mercy on me, an old man, and go away. You have frightened me to death already and now you want to fight a duel.

SMIRNOV [*paying no attention*]. A duel. That's equity, that's emancipation. That way the sexes are made equal. I'll shoot her down as a matter of principle. What can a person say to such a woman? [*Imitating her.*] "The devil take you. I'll put a bullet in your impudent head." What can a person say to that? She was angry, her eyes blazed, she accepted the challenge. On my honor it's the first time in my life that I ever saw such a woman.

LUKA. Oh, sir. Go away. Go away from here.

SMIRNOV. That *is* a woman. I can understand her. A real woman. No shilly-shallying, but fire, powder, and noise! It would be a pity to shoot a woman like that.

LUKA [*weeping*]. Oh, sir; go away.

[*Enter Mrs. Popov.*]

MRS. POPOV. Here are the pistols. But before we have our duel please show me how to shoot. I have never had a pistol in my hand before!

LUKA. God be merciful and have pity upon us! I'll go and get the gardener and the coachman. Why has this horror come to us! [*He goes out.*]

SMIRNOV [*looking at the pistols*]. You see there are different kinds of pistols. There are special duelling pistols with cap and ball. But these are revolvers, Smith & Wesson, with ejectors, fine pistols. A pair like that cost at least ninety rubles. This is the way to hold a revolver. [*Aside.*] Those eyes, those eyes! A real woman!

MRS. POPOV. Like this?

SMIRNOV. Yes, that way. Then you pull the hammer back — so — then you aim — put your head back a little — just stretch your arm out, please. So — then press your finger on the thing like that, and that is all. The chief thing is this: don't get excited, don't hurry your aim, and take care that your hand doesn't tremble.

MRS. POPOV. It isn't as well to shoot inside, let's go into the garden.

SMIRNOV. Yes. I'll tell you now that I am going to shoot into the air.

MRS. POPOV. That is too much. Why?

SMIRNOV. Because — because — That's my business why.

MRS. POPOV. You are afraid. Yes. A-h-h-h. No, no, my dear sir, no welching. Please follow me. I won't rest myself, until I've made a hole in your head that I hate so much. Are you afraid?

SMIRNOV. Yes, I'm afraid.

MRS. POPOV. You are lying. Why won't you fight?

SMIRNOV. Because — because — I — like you.

MRS. POPOV [*with an angry laugh*]. You like me! He dares to say that he likes me. [*She points to the door.*] Go.

SMIRNOW [*laying the revolver silently on the table, takes his hat and goes; at the door he stops a moment gazing at her silently, then he approaches her undecidedly*]. Listen? Are you still angry? I was mad as the devil, but please understand me — how can I express myself? — The thing is like this — such things are — [*He raises his voice.*] How is it my fault that you owe me money? [*Grasps the chair back which breaks.*] The devil knows what breakable furniture you have! I like you! Do you understand? — I — I'm almost in love!

MRS. POPOV. Leave. I hate you.

SMIRNOV. Lord! What a woman! I never in my life met one like her. I'm lost, ruined! I've been caught like a mouse in a trap.

MRS. POPOV. Go, or I'll shoot.

SMIRNOV. Shoot! You have no idea what happiness it would be to die in sight

of those beautiful eyes, to die from the revolver in this little velvet hand — I'm mad! Consider it and decide immediately for if I go now; we shall never see each other again. Decide — speak — I am a noble, a respectable man, have an income of ten thousand, can shoot a coin thrown into the air — I own some fine horses. Will you be my wife?

Mrs. Popov [*swings the revolver angrily*]. Shoot!

Smirnov. My mind is not clear — I can't understand — servant — water! I have fallen in love like any young man. [*He takes her hand and she cries with pain.*] I love you! [*He kneels.*] I love you as I have never loved before. Twelve women, I threw over, nine were untrue to me, but not one of them all have I loved as I love you. I am conquered, lost, I lie at your feet like a fool and beg for your hand. Shame and disgrace! For five years I haven't been in love, I thanked the Lord for it and now I am caught, like a carriage tongue in another carriage. I beg for your hand! Yes or no? Will you? — Good! [*He gets up and goes to the door quickly.*]

Mrs. Popov. Wait a moment —

Smirnov [*stopping*]. Well?

Mrs. Popov. Nothing. You may go. But — wait a moment. No, go on, go on. I hate you. Or no. Don't go. Oh, if you knew how angry I was, how angry! [*She throws the revolver onto the chair.*] My finger is swollen from this thing. [*She angrily tears her handkerchief.*] What are you standing there for? Get out!

Smirnov. Farewell!

Mrs. Popov. Yes, go. [*Cries out.*] What are you going for? Wait — no, go!! Oh, how angry I am! Don't come too near, don't come too near — er — come — no nearer.

Smirnov [*approaching her*]. How angry I am with myself. Fallen in love like a school-boy, thrown myself on my knees. I've got a chill! [*Strongly.*] I love you. This is fine,— all I needed was to fall in love. To-morrow I have to pay my interest, the hay harvest has begun and then you appear. [*He takes her in his arms.*] I can never forgive myself.

Mrs. Popov. Go away! Take your hands off me! I hate you — you — this is — [*A long kiss.*]

[*Enter Luka with an ax, the gardener with a rake, the coachman with a pitch-fork, workmen with poles.*]

Luka [*staring at the pair*]. Merciful Heavens! [*A long pause.*]

Mrs. Popov [*dropping her eyes*]. Tell them in the stable that Tobby isn't to have any oats.

[*Curtain.*]

HIS WIDOW'S HUSBAND

A Comedy

By Jacinto Benevente

Translated by John Garrett Underhill.

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First presented at the Teatro Principe Alfonso, Madrid, on the evening of the nineteenth of October, 1908.

CHARACTERS

CAROLINA.
EUDOSIA.
PAQUITA.
FLORENCIO.
CASALONGA.
ZURITA.
VALDIVIESO.

THE SCENE *is laid in a provincial capital.*

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HIS WIDOW'S HUSBAND

A Comedy

By Jacinto Benevente

[*Carolina is seated as Zurita enters.*]

Zurita. My friend!

Carolina. My good Zurita, it is so thoughtful of you to come so promptly! I shall never be able to repay all your kindness.

Zurita. I am always delighted to be of service to a friend.

Carolina. I asked them to look for you everywhere. Pardon the inconvenience, but the emergency was extreme. I am in a terrible position; all the tact in the world can never extricate me from one of those embarrassing predicaments — unless you assist me by your advice.

Zurita. Count upon my advice; count upon me in anything. However, I cannot believe that you are really in an embarrassing predicament.

Carolina. But I am, my friend; and you are the only one who can advise me. You are a person of taste; your articles and society column are the standard of good form with us. Everybody accepts and respects your decisions.

Zurita. Not invariably, I am sorry to say — especially now that I have taken up the suppression of the hips, which are fatal to the success of any *toilette*. Society was formerly very select in this city, but it is no longer the same, as you no doubt have occasion to know. Too many fortunes have been improvised, too many aristocratic families have descended in the scale. There has been a great change in society. The *parvenus* dominate — and money is so insolent! People who have it imagine that other things can be improvised — as education, for example, manners, good taste. Surely you must realize that such things cannot be improvised. Distinction is a hothouse plant. We grow too few gardenias nowadays — like you, my friend. On the other hand, we have an abundance of sow-thistles. Not that I am referring to the Nuñez family. . . . How do you suppose those ladies enliven their Wednesday evenings? With a gramophone, my friend, with a gramophone — just like any vulgar café; although I must confess that it is an improvement upon the days when the youngest sang, the middle one recited, and all played together. Nevertheless it is horrible. You can imagine my distress.

Carolina. You know, of course, that I never take part in their Wednesdays. I never call unless I am sure they are not at home.

Zurita. But that is no longer a protection; they leave the gramophone. And the maid invites you to wait and entertain yourself with the *Mochuelo*. What is a man to do? It is impossible to resent the records upon the maid. But we are wandering from the subject. You excite my curiosity.

Carolina. You know that to-morrow is the day of the unveiling of the statue of my husband, of my previous husband —

Zurita. A fitting honor to the memory of that great, that illustrious man. This province owes him much, and so does all Spain. We who enjoyed the privilege of calling ourselves his friends, should be delighted to see justice done to his deserts at last, here where political jealousies and intrigues have always belittled the achievements of our eminent men. But Don Patricio Molinete could have no enemies. To-morrow will atone for much of the pettiness of the past.

Carolina. No doubt. I feel I ought to be proud and happy, although you understand the delicacy of my position. Now that I have married again, my name is not the same. Yet it is impossible to ignore the fact that once it was mine, especially as everybody knows that we were a model couple. I might per-

haps have avoided the situation by leaving town for a few days on account of my health, but then that might have been misinterpreted. People might have thought that I was displeased, or that I declined to participate.

ZURITA. Assuredly. Although your name is no longer the same, owing to circumstances, the force of which we appreciate, that is no reason why you should be deprived of the honor of having borne it worthily at the time. Your present husband has no right to take offense.

CAROLINA. No, poor Florencio! In fact, he was the first to realize that I ought to take a leading part in the rejoicing. Poor Florencio was always poor Patricio's greatest admirer. Their political ideas were the same; they agreed in everything.

ZURITA. Apparently.

CAROLINA. As I have reason to know. Poor Patricio loved me dearly; perhaps that was what led poor Florencio to imagine that there was something in me to justify the affection of that great-hearted and intellectual man. It was enough for me to know that Florencio was Patricio's most intimate friend in order to form my opinion of him. Of course, I recognize that Florencio's gifts will never enable him to shine so brilliantly, but that is not to say that he is wanting in ability. He lacks ambition, that is all. All his desires are satisfied at home with me, at his own fireside. And I am as well pleased to have it so. I am not ambitious myself. The seasons which I spent with my husband in Madrid were a source of great uneasiness to me. I passed the week during which he was Minister of Agriculture in one continual state of anxiety. Twice he nearly had a duel — over some political question. I did not know which way to turn. If he had ever become Prime Minister, as was actually predicted by a newspaper which he controlled, I should have been obliged to take to my bed for the week.

ZURITA. You are not like our senator's wife, Señora Espinosa, nor the wife of our present mayor. They will never rest, nor allow others to do so, until they see their husbands erected in marble.

CAROLINA. Do you think that either Espinosa or the mayor are of a caliber to deserve statues?

ZURITA. Not publicly, perhaps. In a private chapel, in the class of martyrs and husbands, it might not be inappropriate. But I am growing impatient.

CAROLINA. As you say, friend Zurita, it might seem marked for me to leave the city. Yet if I remain I must attend the unveiling of the monument to my poor Patricio; I must be present at the memorial exercises to-night in his honor; I must receive the delegations from Madrid and the other cities, as well as the committees from the rest of the province. But what attitude ought I to assume? If I seem too sad, nobody will believe that my feeling is sincere. On the other hand, it would not be proper to appear altogether reconciled. Then people would think that I had forgotten too quickly. In fact, they think so already.

ZURITA. Oh, no! You were very young when you became a widow. Life was just beginning for you.

CAROLINA. It is a delicate matter, however, to explain to my sisters-in-law. Tell me, what ought I to wear? Anything severe, an attempt at mourning, would be ridiculous, since I am going with my husband; on the other hand, I should not like to suggest a festive spirit. What do you think, friend Zurita? Give me your advice. What would you wear?

ZURITA. It is hard to say; the problem is difficult. Something rich and black, perhaps, relieved by a note of violet. The unveiling of a monument to perpetuate the memory of a great man is not an occasion for mourning. Your husband is partaking already of the joys of immortality, in which no doubt, he anticipates you.

CAROLINA. Thank you so much.

ZURITA. Do not thank me. You have done enough. You have been faithful to his memory. You have married again, but you have married a man who was your husband's most intimate friend. You have not acted like other widows of my acquaintance — Señora Benitez, for example. She has been living for two years with the deadliest enemy her husband had in the province, without any pretense at getting married — which in her case would have been preposterous.

CAROLINA. There is no comparison.

ZURITA. No, my friend; everybody sympathizes with your position, as they ought.

CAROLINA. The only ones who worry me are my sisters-in-law. They insist that my position is ridiculous, and that of my husband still more so. They do not see how we can have the effrontery to present ourselves before the statue.

ZURITA. Señora, I should not hesitate though it were that of the Commander. Your sisters-in-law exaggerate. Your present husband is the only one you have to consider.

CAROLINA. I have no misgivings upon that score. I know that both will appreciate that my feelings are sincere, one in this world, and the other from the next. As for the rest, the rest —

ZURITA. The rest are your friends and your second husband's friends, as we were of the first. We shall all take your part. The others you can afford to neglect.

CAROLINA. Thanks for those words of comfort. I knew that you were a good friend of ours, as you were also of his.

ZURITA. A friend to both, to all three; *si, señora,* to all three. But here is your husband.

[*Don Florencio enters.*]

ZURITA. Don Florencio! My friend!

FLORENCIO. My dear Zurita! I am delighted to see you! I wish to thank you for that charming article in memory of our never-to-be-forgotten friend. It was good of you, and I appreciate it. You have certainly proved yourself an excellent friend of his. Thanks, my dear Zurita, thanks! Carolina and I are both indebted to you for your charming article. It brought tears to our eyes. Am I right, Carolina?

CAROLINA. We were tremendously affected by it.

FLORENCIO. Friend Zurita, I am deeply gratified. For the first time in the history of the province, all parties have united to do honor to this region's most eminent son. But have you seen the monument? It is a work of art. The statue is a perfect likeness — it is the man, the man himself! The allegorical features are wonderfully artistic — Commerce, Industry, and Truth taken altogether in the nude. Nothing finer could be wished. You can imagine the trouble, however, we had with the nudes. The conservative element opposed the nudes, but the sculptor declined to proceed if the nudes were suppressed. In the end we won a decisive victory for Art.

CAROLINA. Do you know, I think it would have been just as well not to have had any nudes? What was the use of offending anybody? Several of our friends are going to remain away from the ceremonies upon that account.

FLORENCIO. How ridiculous! That only shows how far we are behind the times. You certainly have no feeling of that sort after having been the companion of that great, that liberal man. I remember the trip we took to Italy together — you surely recollect it, Carolina. I never saw a man so struck with admiration at those marvelous monuments of pagan and Renaissance art. Oh, what a man! What a wonderful man! He was an artist. Ah! Before I forget it, Carolina, Gutiérrez asked me for any pictures you have for the special edition of his paper, and I should like to have him publish the verses which he wrote you when you were first engaged. Did you ever see those verses? That man might have been a poet — he might have been anything else for that matter. Talk about letters! I wish you could see his letters. Carolina, let us see some of those letters he wrote you when you were engaged.

CAROLINA. Not now. That is hardly the time. . . .

FLORENCIO. Naturally. In spite of the satisfaction which we feel, these are trying days for us. We are united by our memories. I fear I shall never be able to control myself at the unveiling of the statue.

CAROLINA. Florencio, for heaven's sake, you must! You must control yourself.

ZURITA. Yes, do control yourself. You must.

FLORENCIO. I am controlling myself.

ZURITA. If there is nothing further that I can do . . .

CAROLINA. No, thank you, Zurita. I am awfully obliged to you. Now that I know what I am to wear, the situation does not seem half so embarrassing.

ZURITA. I understand. A woman's position is never so embarrassing as when she is hesitating as to what to put on.

CAROLINA. Until to-morrow then?

ZURITA. Don Florencio!

FLORENCIO. Thank you again for your charming article. It was admirable! Admirable!

[*Zurita retires.*]

FLORENCIO. I see that you feel it deeply! you are touched. So am I. It is foolish to attempt to conceal it.

CAROLINA. I don't know how to express it, but — I am upset.

FLORENCIO. Don't forget the pictures, however, especially the one where the three of us were taken together on the second platform of the Eiffel tower. It was particularly good.

CAROLINA. Yes, something out of the ordinary. Don't you think, perhaps, that our private affairs, our family life. . . . How do we know whether at this time, in our situation. . . .

FLORENCIO. What are you afraid of? That is the woman of it. How narrow-minded! You ought to be above such pettiness after having been the wife of such an intelligent man. Every detail of the private life of the great has its interest for history. Those of us who knew him, who in a certain sense were his colaborers — you will not accuse me of immodesty — his colaborers in the great work of his life, owe it to history to see that the truth be known.

CAROLINA. Nevertheless I hardly think I would print those letters — much less the verses. Do you remember what they said?

FLORENCIO. Of course, I remember:

"Like a moth on a pin I preserve all your kisses! . . ."

Everybody makes allowances for poetry. Nobody is going to take seriously what he reads in a poem. He married you anyway. Why should any one object?

CAROLINA. Stop, Florencio! What are you talking about? We are making ourselves ridiculous.

FLORENCIO. Why should we make ourselves ridiculous? Although I shall certainly stand by you, whatever you decide, if for no other reason than that I am your husband, his widow's husband. Otherwise people might think that I wanted you to forget, that I was jealous of his memory; and you know that is not the case. You know how I admired him, how I loved him — just as he did me. Nobody could get along with him as well as I could; he was not easy to get along with, I do not need to tell you that. He had his peculiarities — they were the peculiarities of a great man — but they were great peculiarities. Like all great men, he had an exaggerated opinion of himself. He was horribly stubborn, like all strong characters. Whenever he got on one of his hobbies no power on earth could pry him off of it. It is only out of respect that I do not say he was pig-headed. I was the only one who had the tact and the patience to do anything with him; you know that well enough. How often you said to me: "Oh, Florencio! I can't stand it any longer!" And then I would reason with you and talk to him, and every time that you had a quarrel I was the one who consoled you afterward.

CAROLINA. Florencio, you are perfectly disgusting! You have no right to talk like this.

FLORENCIO. Very well then, my dear. I understand how you feel. This is a time when everybody is dwelling on his virtues, his good qualities, but I want you to remember that that great man had also his faults.

CAROLINA. You don't know what you are talking about.

FLORENCIO. Compare me with him —

CAROLINA. Florencio? You know that in my mind there has never been any comparison. Comparisons are odious.

FLORENCIO. Not necessarily. But of course you have not! You have never regretted giving up his distinguished name, have you, Carolina, for this humble one of mine? Only I want you to understand that if I had desired to shine, if I had been ambitious. . . . I have talent myself. Now admit it!

CAROLINA. Of course I do, my dear, of course! But what is the use of talking nonsense?

FLORENCIO. What is the matter with you, anyway? You are nervous to-day. It is impossible to conduct a sensible conversation.— Hello! Your sisters-in-law! I am not at home.

CAROLINA. Don't excite yourself. They never ask for you.

FLORENCIO. I am delighted! . . . Well, I wish you a short session and escape.

CAROLINA. I am in a fine humor for this sort of thing myself.

[*Florencio goes out. Eudosia and Paquita enter.*]

EUDOSIA. I trust that we do not intrude?

CAROLINA. How can you ask? Come right in.

EUDOSIA. It seems we find you at home for once.

CAROLINA. So it seems.

PAQUITA. Strange to say, whenever we call you always appear to be out.

CAROLINA. A coincidence.

EUDOSIA. The coincidence is to find you at home. [*A pause.*] We passed your husband on the street.

CAROLINA. Are you sure that you would recognize him?

PAQUITA. Oh! he was not alone.

CAROLINA. Is that so?

EUDOSIA. Paquita saw him with Somolino's wife, at Sanchez the confectioner's.

CAROLINA. Very possibly.

PAQUITA. I should not make light of it, if I were you. You know what Somolino's wife is, to say nothing of Sanchez the confectioner.

CAROLINA. I didn't know about the confectioner.

EUDOSIA. No respectable woman, no woman who even pretends to be respectable, would set foot in his shop since he married that French girl.

CAROLINA. I didn't know about the French girl.

EUDOSA. Yes, he married her — I say married her to avoid using another term. He married her in Bayonne — if you call such a thing marriage — civilly, which is the way French people marry. It is a land of perdition.

CAROLINA. I am very sorry to hear it because I am awfully fond of sweetmeats. I adore *bonbons* and *marrons glacés*, and nobody here has as good ones as Sanchez, nor anywhere else for that matter.

PAQUITA. In that case you had as well deny yourself, unless you are prepared to invite criticism. Somolino's wife is the only woman who enters the shop and faces the French girl, who gave her a receipt for dyeing her hair on the spot. You must have noticed how she is doing it now.

CAROLINA. I hadn't noticed.

EUDOSIA. It is not jet-black any more; it is baby-pink — so she is having the Frenchwoman manicure her nails twice a week. Have you noticed the condition of her nails? They are the talk of the town.

[*A pause.*]

PAQUITA. Well, I trust he is satisfied.

CAROLINA. Who is he?

PAQUITA. I do not call him your husband. Oh, our poor, dear brother!

CAROLINA. I have not the slightest idea what you are talking about.

EUDOSIA. So he has had his way at last and desecrated the statue of our poor brother with the figures of those naked women?

PAQUITA. As large as life.

CAROLINA. But Florencio is not responsible. It was the sculptor and the committee. I cannot see anything objectionable in them myself. There are such figures on all monuments. They are allegorical.

EUDOSIA. I could understand, perhaps, why the statue of Truth should be unclothed. Something of the sort was always expected of Truth. But I must say that Commerce and Industry might have had a tunic at least. Commerce, in my opinion, is particularly indecent.

PAQUITA. We have declined the seats which were reserved for us. They were directly in front and you could see everything.

EUDOSIA. I suppose you still intend to be present? What a pity that there is nobody to give you proper advice!

CAROLINA. As I have been invited, I judge that I shall be welcome as I am.

PAQUITA. Possibly — if it were good form for you to appear at all. But when you exhibit yourself with that man — who was his best friend — after only three short years!

CAROLINA. Three long years.

EUDOSIA. No doubt they seemed long to you. Three years, did I say? They were like days to us who still keep his memory green!

PAQUITA. Who still bear his name, because no other name sounds so noble in our ears.

EUDOSIA. Rather than change it, we have declined very flattering proposals.

CAROLINA. I am afraid that you have made a mistake. You remember that

your brother was very anxious to see you married.

PAQUITA. He imagined that all men were like him, and deserved wives like us, our poor, dear brother! Who would ever have dreamed he could have been forgotten so soon? Fancy his emotions as he looks down on you from the skies.

CAROLINA. I do not believe for one moment that he has any regrets. If he had, then what would be the use of being in paradise? Don't you worry about me. The best thing that a young widow can do is marry at once. I was a very young widow.

EUDOSIA. You were twenty-nine.

CAROLINA. Twenty-six.

EUDOSIA. We concede you twenty-six. At all events, you were not a child — not to speak of the fact that no widow can be said to be a child.

CAROLINA. No more than a single woman can be said to be old. However, I fail to see that there would be any impropriety in my being present at the unveiling of the statue.

EUDOSIA. Do you realize that the premature death of your husband will be the subject of all the speakers? They will dwell on the bereavement which we have suffered through the loss of such an eminent man. How do you propose to take it? When people see you standing there, complacent and satisfied, alongside of that man, do you suppose they will ever believe that you are not reconciled?

PAQUITA. What will your husband do while they are extolling the genius of our brother, and he knows that he never had any?

CAROLINA. That was not your brother's opinion. He thought very highly of Florencio.

EUDOSIA. Very highly. Our poor, dear brother! Among his other abilities he certainly had an extraordinary aptitude for allowing himself to be deceived.

CAROLINA. That assumption is offensive to me; it is unfair to all of us.

EUDOSIA. I hope you brought it with you, Paquita?

PAQUITA. Yes; here it is.

[*Taking out a book.*]

EUDOSIA. Just look through this book if you have a moment. It arrived to-day from Madrid and is on sale at Valdivieso's. Just glance through it.

CAROLINA. What is the book? [*Reading the title upon the cover.*] "Don Patricio Molinete, the Man and His Work. A Biography. Together with His Correspondence and an Estimate of His Life." Why, thanks —

PAQUITA. No, do not thank us. Read, read what our poor brother has written to the author of this book, who was one of his intimate friends.

CAROLINA. Recaredo Casalonga. Ah! I remember — a rascal we were obliged to turn out of the house. Do you mean to say that scamp Casalonga has any letters? Merely to hear the name makes me nervous.

EUDOSIA. But go on! Page two hundred and fourteen. Is that the page, Paquita?

PAQUITA. It begins on page two hundred and fourteen, but before it amounts to anything turn the page.

CAROLINA. Quick, quick! Let me see. What does he say? What are these letters? What is this? He says that I. . . . But there is not a word of truth in it. My husband could never have written this.

EUDOSIA. But there it is in cold type. You don't suppose they would dare to print —

CAROLINA. But this is outrageous; this book is a libel. It invades the private life — the most private part of it! It must be stopped.

EUDOSIA. It cannot be stopped. You will soon see whether or not it can be stopped.

PAQUITA. Probably the edition is exhausted by this time.

CAROLINA. Is that so? We shall see! We shall see! — Florencio! Florencio! Come quickly! Florencio!

EUDOSIA. Perhaps he has not yet returned.

PAQUITA. He seemed to be enjoying himself.

CAROLINA. Nonsense! He was never out of the house. You are two old busybodies!

EUDOSIA. Carolina! You said that without thinking.

PAQUITA. I cannot believe my ears. Did you say busybody.

CAROLINA. That is exactly what I said. Now leave me alone. I can't stand it. It is all your fault. You are insupportable!

EUDOSIA and PAQUITA. Carolina!

CAROLINA. Florencio! Florencio!

[*Florencio enters.*]

FLORENCIO. What is it, my dear? What is the matter? Ah! You? I am delighted. . . .

EUDOSIA. Yes, we! And we are leaving this house, where we have been insulted — forever!

PAQUITA. Where we have been called busybodies!

EUDOSIA. Where we have been told that we were insupportable!

PAQUITA. And when people say such things you can imagine what they think!

FLORENCIO. But Eudosia, Paquita. . . . I do not understand. As far as I am concerned. . . .

EUDOSIA. The person who is now your wife will make her explanations to you.

PAQUITA. I never expected to be driven out of our brother's house like this!

EUDOSIA. Our poor, dear brother!

FLORENCIO. But, Carolina —

CAROLINA. Let them go! Let them go! They are impossible.

PAQUITA. Did you hear that, Eudosia? We are impossible!

EUDOSIA. I heard it, Paquita. There is nothing left for us to hear in this house.

CAROLINA. Yes there is! You are as impossible as all old maids.

EUDOSIA. There was something for us to hear after all! Come, Paquita.

PAQUITA. Come, Eudosia.

[*They go out.*]

FLORENCIO. What is this trouble between you and your sisters-in-law?

CAROLINA. There isn't any trouble. We were arguing, that was all. There is nothing those women like so much as gossip, or making themselves disagreeable in any way they can. Do you remember Casalonga?

FLORENCIO. Recaredo Casalonga? I should say I did remember him! That man was a character, and strange to say, a profound philosopher with it all. He was quite a humorist.

CAROLINA. Yes, he was. Well, this philosopher, this humorist, has conceived the terribly humorous idea of publishing this book.

FLORENCIO. Let me see. "Don Patricio Molinete, the Man and His Work. A Biography. Together with His Correspondence and an Estimate of His Life." A capital idea! They were great friends, you know, although I don't suppose that there can be anything particular in this book. What could Casalonga tell us anyway?

CAROLINA. Us? Nothing. But go on, go on.

FLORENCIO. You don't say! Letters of Patricio's. Addressed to whom?

CAROLINA. To the author of the book, so it seems. Personal letters, they are confidential. Go on, go on.

FLORENCIO. "Dear Friend: Life is sad. Perhaps you ask the cause of my disillusionment. How is it that I have lost my faith in the future, in the future of our unfortunate land?" I remember that time. He was already ill. This letter was written after he had liver complaint and took a dark view of everything. Ah! What a pity that great men should be subject to such infirmities! Think of the intellect being made the slave of the liver! We are but dust. "The future of this unfortunate land. . . ."

CAROLINA. No, that doesn't amount to anything. Lower down, lower down. Go on.

FLORENCIO. "Life is sad!"

CAROLINA. Are you beginning all over again?

FLORENCIO. No, he repeats himself. What is this? "I never loved but once in my life; I never loved but one woman — my wife." He means you.

CAROLINA. Yes. Go on, go on.

FLORENCIO. "I never trusted but one friend, my friend Florencio." He means me.

CAROLINA. Yes, yes; he means you. But go on, go on.

FLORENCIO. I wonder what he can be driving at. Ah! What does he say? That you, that I. . . .

CAROLINA. Go on, go on.

FLORENCIO. "This woman and this man, the two greatest, the two pure, the two unselfish passions of my life, in whom my very being was consumed — how can I bring myself to confess it? I hardly dare admit it to myself! They are in love — they love each other madly — in secret — perhaps without even suspecting themselves."

CAROLINA. What do you think of that?

FLORENCIO. Suspecting themselves.

. . . "They are struggling to overcome their guilty passion, but how long will they continue to struggle? Yet I am sorry for them both. What ought I to do? I cannot sleep."

CAROLINA. What do you say?

FLORENCIO. Impossible! He never wrote such letters. Besides, if he did, they ought never to have been published.

CAROLINA. But true or false, they have been published, and here they are. Ah! But this is nothing! You ought to see what he says farther on. He goes on communicating his observations, and there are some, to be perfectly frank, which nobody could have made but himself.

FLORENCIO. You don't mean to tell me that you think these letters are genuine?

CAROLINA. They might be for all we know. He gives dates and details.

FLORENCIO. And all the time we thought he suspected nothing!

CAROLINA. You do jump so at conclusions, Florencio. How could he suspect? You know how careful we were about everything, no matter what happened, so as not to hurt his feelings.

FLORENCIO. This only goes to show all the good that it did us.

CAROLINA. He could only suspect — that it was the truth; that we were loving in silence.

FLORENCIO. Then perhaps you can explain to me what was the use of all this silence? Don't you see that what he has done now is to go and blurt the whole thing out to this rascal Casalonga? — an unscrupulous knave whose only interest in the matter is to turn these confidences to his own advantage! It is useless to attempt to defend it. Such foolishness was unpardonable. I should never have believed it of my friend. If he had any doubts about me — about us — why didn't he say so? Then we could have been more careful, and have done something to ease his mind. But this notion of running and telling the first person who happens along. . . What a position does it leave me in? In what light do we appear at this time? Now, when everybody is paying respect to his memory, and I have put myself to all this trouble in order to raise money for this monument — what are people going to think when they read these things?

CAROLINA. I always said that we would have trouble with that monument.

FLORENCIO. How shall I have the face to present myself to-morrow before the monument?

CAROLINA. My sisters-in-law were right. We are going to be conspicuous.

FLORENCIO. Ah! But this must be stopped. I shall run at once to the offices of the papers, to the judicial authorities, to the governor, to all the booksellers. As for this Casalonga — Ah! I will settle with him! Either he will retract and confess that these letters are forgeries from beginning to end, or I will kill him! I will fight with him in earnest!

CAROLINA. Florencio! Don't forget yourself! You are going too far. You don't mean a duel? To expose your life?

FLORENCIO. Don't you see that it is impossible to submit to such an indignity? Where is this thing going to stop? Is nobody's private life to be secure? And this goes deeper than the private life — it impugns the sanctity of our intentions.

CAROLINA. No, Florencio!

FLORENCIO. Let me go!

CAROLINA. Florencio! Anything but a duel! No, no!

FLORENCIO. Ah! Either he will retract and withdraw the edition of this libel or, should he refuse. . . .

CAROLINA. Zurita!

FLORENCIO. My friend. . . . You are just in time!

[*Zurita enters.*]

ZURITA. Don Florencio. . . . Carolina. . . . Don't say a word! I know how you feel.

FLORENCIO. Did you see it? Did you hear it? Is this a civilized country in which we live?

CAROLINA. But surely he has not heard it already?

ZURITA. Yes, at the Club. Some one had the book; they were passing it around. . . .

FLORENCIO. At the Club?

ZURITA. Don't be alarmed. Everybody thinks it is blackmail — a case of *chantage*. Don Patricio could never have written such letters.

FLORENCIO. Ah! So they think that?

ZURITA. Even if he had, they deal with private matters, which ought never to have been made public.

FLORENCIO. Exactly my idea — with private matters; they are confidential.

ZURITA. I lost no time, as you may be sure, of hurrying to Valdivieso's shop, where the books are on sale. I found him amazed; he was entirely innocent. He bought the copies supposing that the subject was of timely importance; that it was of a serious nature. He hurried at once to withdraw the copies from the window, and ran in search of the author.

FLORENCIO. Of the author? Is the author in town?

ZURITA. Yes, he came with the books; he arrived with them this morning.

FLORENCIO. Ah! So this scamp Casalonga is here, is he? Tell me where I can find him!

ZURITA. At the Hotel de Europa.

CAROLINA. Florencio! Don't you go! Hold him back! He means to challenge him.

ZURITA. Never! It is not worth the trouble. Besides, you ought to hold yourself above such things. Your wife is above them.

FLORENCIO. But what will people say, friend Zurita? What will people say?

ZURITA. Everybody thinks it is a huge joke.

FLORENCIO. A joke? Then our position is ridiculous.

ZURITA. I did not say that. What I do say. . . .

FLORENCIO. No, no, friend Zurita; you are a man of honor, you know that it is necessary for me to kill this man.

CAROLINA. But suppose he is the one who kills you? No, Florencio, not a duel! What is the use of the courts?

FLORENCIO. No, I prefer to fight. My dear Zurita, run in search of another friend and stop at the Hotel de Europa as my representatives. Seek out this man, exact reparation upon the spot — a reparation which shall be resounding, complete. Either he declares over his own signature that those letters are impudent forgeries or, should he refuse. . . .

CAROLINA. Florencio!

FLORENCIO. Stop at nothing! Do not haggle over terms. Let it be pistols with real bullets, as we pace forward each to each!

ZURITA. But, Don Florencio!

CAROLINA. Don't go, I beg of you! Don't leave the house!

FLORENCIO. You are my friend — go at once!

CAROLINA. No, he will never go!

ZURITA. But, Don Florencio! Consider. . . . The situation is serious.

FLORENCIO. When a man is made ridiculous the situation ceases to be serious! How shall I have the face to show myself before the monument! I — his most intimate friend! She, my wife, his widow! And everybody thinking all the while of those letters, imagining that I, that she. . . . No, no! Run! Bring me that retraction at once.

ZURITA. Not so fast! I hear the voice of Valdivieso.

FLORENCIO. Eh? And Casalonga's! Has that man the audacity to present himself in my house?

ZURITA. Be calm! Since he is here, perhaps he comes to explain. Let me see —

[*He goes out.*]

CAROLINA. Florencio! Don't you receive him! Don't you have anything to do with that man!

FLORENCIO. I am in my own house. Never fear! I shall not forget to conduct myself as a gentleman. Now we shall see how he explains the matter; we shall see. But you had better retire first. Questions of honor are not for women.

CAROLINA. You know best; only I think I might remain within earshot. I am nervous. My dear! — Where are your arms?

FLORENCIO. What do I need of arms?

CAROLINA. Be careful just the same. Keep cool! Think of me.

FLORENCIO. I am in my own house. Have no fear.

CAROLINA. It upsets me dreadfully to see you in such a state.

FLORENCIO. What are you doing now?

CAROLINA. Removing these vases in case you should throw things. I should hate awfully to lose them; they were a present.

FLORENCIO. Hurry, dear!

CAROLINA. I am horribly nervous. Keep cool, for heavens' sake! Control yourself.

[*Carolina goes out. Zurita reënters.*]

ZURITA. Are you calmer now?

FLORENCIO. Absolutely. Is that man here?

ZURITA. Yes, Valdivieso brought him. He desires to explain.

FLORENCIO. Who? Valdivieso? Naturally. But that other fellow, that Casalonga — what does he want?

ZURITA. To have a few words with you; to offer a thousand explanations.

FLORENCIO. No more than one explanation is possible.

ZURITA. Consider a moment. In my opinion it will be wiser to receive him. He appears to be innocent.

FLORENCIO. Of the first instincts of a gentleman.

ZURITA. Exactly. I did not venture to put it so plainly. He attaches no importance to the affair whatever.

FLORENCIO. Of course not! It is nothing to him.

ZURITA. Nothing. However, you will find him disposed to go to any length — retract, make a denial, withdraw the book from circulation. You had best have a few words with him. But first promise to control yourself. Shall I ask them to come in?

FLORENCIO. Yes . . . yes! Ask them to come in.

ZURITA. Poor Valdivieso is awfully put out. He always had such a high opinion of you. You are one of the two or three persons in this town who buy books. It would be a tremendous relief to him if you would only tell him that you knew he was incapable. . . .

FLORENCIO. Thoroughly! Poor Valdivieso! Ask him to come in; ask them both to come in.

[*Zurita retires and returns presently with Valdivieso and Casalonga.*]

VALDIVIESO. Señor Don Florencio! I hardly know what to say. I am sure that you will not question my good faith in the matter. I had no idea . . . in fact, I never suspected. . . .

FLORENCIO. I always knew you were innocent! but this person. . . .

CASALONGA. Come, come now! Don't blame it on me. How the devil was I to know that you were here — and married to his widow! Sport for the gods!

FLORENCIO. Do you hear what he says?

ZURITA. I told you that he appeared to be innocent.

FLORENCIO. And I told you that he was devoid of the first instincts of a gentleman; although I failed to realize to what an extent. Sir —

CASALONGA. Don't be absurd! Stop making faces at me.

FLORENCIO. In the first place, I don't recall that we were ever so intimate.

CASALONGA. Of course we were! Of course! Anyhow, what difference does it make? We were together for a whole season; we were inseparable. Hard times those for us both! But what did we care? When one of us was out of money, all he had to do was to ask the other, and be satisfied.

FLORENCIO. Yes; I seem to recall that the other was always I.

CASALONGA. Ha, ha, ha! That might be. Stranger things have happened. But you are not angry with me, are you? The thing is not worth all this fuss.

FLORENCIO. Do you hear what he says?

VALDIVIESO. You may be sure that if I had had the slightest idea. . . . I bought the books so as to take advantage of the timeliness of the monument. If I had ever suspected. . . .

CASALONGA. Identically my position — to take advantage of the monument. Life is hard. While the conservatives are in power, I am reduced to extremities. I am at my wit's end to earn an honest penny.

FLORENCIO. I admire your colossal impudence. What are you going to do with a man like this?

ZURITA. Exactly the question that occurred to me. What are you going to do?

CASALONGA. For a time I was reduced to writing plays — like everybody else — although mine were better. That was the reason they did not succeed. Then I married my last landlady; I was obliged to settle with her somehow. A little difference arose between us, so we agreed to separate amicably after smashing all the furniture. However, that will be of no interest to you.

FLORENCIO. No, no, it is of no interest to me.

CASALONGA. A novel, my boy! A veritable work of romance! I wandered all over the country explaining views for the cinematograph. You know what a gift I have for talk? Wherever I ap-

peared the picture houses were crowded — even to the exits. Then my voice gave out. I was obliged to find some other outlet for my activities. I thought of my friends. You know what friends are; as soon as a man needs them he hasn't any friends. Which way was I to turn? I happened to hear that you were unveiling a monument to the memory of friend Patricio. Poor Patricio! That man was a friend! He could always be relied upon. It occurred to me that I might write out a few pages of reminiscences — preferably something personal — and publish any letters of his which I had chanced to preserve.

FLORENCIO. What luck!

CASALONGA. Pshaw! Bread and butter — bread and butter, man! A mere pittance. It occurred to me that they would sell better here than anywhere else — this is where he lived. So I came this morning third class — think of that, third class! — and hurried at once to this fellow's shop. I placed two thousand copies with him, which he took from me at a horrible discount. You know what these booksellers are. . . .

VALDIVIESO. I call you to witness — what was customary under the circumstances. He was selling for cash.

CASALONGA. Am I the man to deny it? You can divide mankind into two classes — knaves and fools.

VALDIVIESO. Listen to this —

CASALONGA. You are not one of the fools.

VALDIVIESO. I protest! How am I to profit by the transaction? Do you suppose that I shall sell a single copy of this libel now that I know that it is offensive to my particular, my excellent friend, Don Florencio, and to his respected wife?

FLORENCIO. Thanks, friend Valdivieso, thanks for that.

VALDIVIESO. I shall burn the edition, although you can imagine what that will cost.

FLORENCIO. The loss will be mine. It will be at my expense.

CASALONGA. What did I tell you? Florencio will pay. What are you complaining about? — If I were in your place, though, I'd be hanged if I would give the man one penny.

VALDIVIESO. What? When you have collected spot cash?

CASALONGA. You don't call that collecting? Not at that discount. The paper was worth more.

FLORENCIO. The impudence of the thing was worth more than the paper.

CASALONGA. Ha, ha, ha! Really, I cannot find it in my heart to be angry with you. You are too clever! But what was I to do? I had to find some outlet for my activities. Are you going to kill me?

FLORENCIO. I have made my arrangements. Do you suppose that I will submit meekly to such an indignity? If you refuse to fight, I will hale you before the courts.

CASALONGA. Drop that tragic tone. A duel? Between us? Over what? Because the wife of a friend — who at the same time happens to be your wife — has been intimate with you? Suppose it had been with some one else!

FLORENCIO. The supposition is improper.

CASALONGA. You are the first man I ever heard of who was offended because it was said that he had been intimate with his wife. The thing is preposterous. How are we ever going to fight over it?

ZURITA. I can see his point of view.

FLORENCIO. Patricio could never have written those letters, much less to you.

CASALONGA. Talk as much as you like, the letters are genuine. Although it may have been foolish of Patricio to have written them — that is a debatable question. I published them so as to enliven the book. A little harmless suggestion — people look for it; it adds spice. Aside from that, what motive could I have had for dragging you into it?

FLORENCIO. I admire your frankness at least.

ZURITA. What do you propose to do with this man?

FLORENCIO. What do you propose?

CASALONGA. You know I was always fond of you. You are a man of ability.

FLORENCIO. Thanks.

CASALONGA. You have more ability than Patricio had. He was a worthy soul, no doubt, but between us, who were in the secret, an utter blockhead.

FLORENCIO. Hardly that.

CASALONGA. I need not tell you what

reputations amount to in this country. If he had had your brains, your transcendent ability. . . .

FLORENCIO. How can I stop this man from talking?

CASALONGA. You have always been too modest in my opinion; you have remained in the background in order to give him a chance to shine, to attract attention. Everybody knows that his best speeches were written by you.

FLORENCE. You have no right to betray my confidence.

CASALONGA. Yes, gentlemen, it is only just that you should know. The real brains belonged to this man, he is the one who should have had the statue. As a friend he is wonderful, unique!

FLORENCIO. How am I going to fight with this man?

CASALONGA. I will give out a statement at once — for public consumption — declaring that the letters are forgeries — or whatever you think best; as it appeals to you. Fix it up for yourself. It is of no consequence anyhow. I am above this sort of thing. I should be sorry, however, to see this fellow receive more than his due, which is two *reals* a copy, or what he paid me.

VALDIVIESO. I cannot permit you to meddle in my affairs. You are a rogue and a cheat.

CASALONGA. A rogue and a cheat? In that case you are the one I will fight with. You are no friend of mine. You are an exploiter of other men's brains.

VALDIVIESO. You are willing to fight with me, are you — a respectable man, the father of a family? After swindling me out of my money!

CASALONGA. Swindling? That is no language to use in this house.

VALDIVIESO. I use it where I like.

FLORENCIO. Gentlemen, gentlemen! This is my house, this is the house of my wife!

ZURITA. Valdivieso!

CASALONGA [*to Florencio*]. I choose you for my second. And you too, my friend — what is your name?

VALDIVIESO. But will you listen to him? Do you suppose that I will fight with this rascal, with the first knave who happens along? I, the father of a family?

CASALONGA. I cannot accept your explanation. My friends will confer with yours and apprise us as to the details. Have everything ready for this afternoon.

VALDIVIESO. Do you stand here and sanction this nonsense? You cannot believe one word that he says. No doubt it would be convenient for you to retire and use me as a Turk's head to receive all the blows, when you are the one who ought to fight!

FLORENCIO. Friend Valdivieso, I cannot permit reflections upon my conduct from you. After all, you need not have purchased the book, which you did for money, knowing that it was improper, since it contained matter which was offensive to me.

VALDIVIESO. Are you speaking in earnest?

FLORENCIO. I was never more in earnest in my life.

CASALONGA. Yes, sir, and it is high time for us all to realize that it is in earnest. It was all your fault. Nobody buys without spending the wares. It was your business to have pointed out to me the indiscretion I was about to commit. [*To Florencio.*] I am perfectly willing to withdraw if you wish to fight him, to yield my place as the aggrieved party to you. I should be delighted to act as one of your seconds, with our good friend here — what is your name?

ZURITA. Zurita.

CASALONGA. My good friend Zurita.

VALDIVIESO. Am I losing my mind? This is a trap which you have set for me, a despicable trap!

FLORENCIO. Friend Valdivieso, I cannot tolerate these reflections. I am incapable of setting a trap.

ZURITA. Ah! And so am I! When you entered this house you were familiar with its reputation.

CASALONGA. You have forgotten with whom you are speaking.

VALDIVIESO. Nonsense! This is too much. I wash my hands of the whole business. Is this the spirit in which my advances are received? What I will do now is sell the book — and if I can't sell it, I will give it away! Everybody can read it then — and they can talk as much as they want to. This is the end! I am through.

FLORENCIO. Wait? What was that?

I warn you not to sell so much as one copy?

ZURITA. I should be sorry if you did. Take care not to drag me into it.

CASALONGA. Nor me either.

VALDIVIESO. Enough! Do as you see fit — and I shall do the same. This is the end — the absolute end! It is the finish!

[*Rushes out.*]

FLORENCIO. Stop him!

CASALONGA. It won't be necessary. I shall go to the shop and take back the edition. Whatever you intended to pay him you can hand directly to me. I am your friend; besides I need the money. This man shall not get the best of me. Oh! By the way, what are you doing to-night? Have dinner with me. I shall expect you at the hotel. Don't forget! If you don't show up, I may drop in myself and have dinner with you.

FLORENCIO. No! What would my wife say? She has trouble enough.

CASALONGA. Nonsense! She knows me, and we should have a good laugh. Is she as charming, as good-looking, as striking as ever? I am keen for her. I don't need to ask whether she is happy. Poor Patricio was a character! What a sight he was! What a figure! And age doubled him for good measure. I'll look in on you later. It has been a rare pleasure this time. There are few friends like you. Come, shake hands! I am touched; you know how it is. See you later! If I don't come back, I have killed my man and am in jail for it. Tell your wife. If I can help out in any way. . . . Good-by, my friend — ah, yes! Zurita. I have a terrible head to-day. See you later!

[*Goes out.*]

FLORENCIO. Did you ever see anything equal of it? I never did, and I knew him of old. But he has made progress.

ZURITA. His assurance is fairly epic.

FLORENCIO. What are you going to do with a man who takes it like this? You cannot kill him in cold blood —

[*Carolina reënters.*]

FLORENCIO. Ah! Carolina! Were you listening? You heard everything.

CAROLINA. Yes, and in spite of it I think he is fascinating.

FLORENCIO. Since Carolina feels that way it simplifies the situation.

ZURITA. Why not? She heard the compliments. The man is irresistible.

FLORENCIO. Carolina, it comes simply to this: nobody attaches any importance to the matter. Only two or three copies have been sold.

CAROLINA. Yes, but one of them was to my sisters-in-law, which is the same as if they had sold forty thousand. They will tell everybody.

FLORENCIO. They were doing it anyhow; there is no further cause for worry.

CAROLINA. At all events, I shall not attend the unveiling to-morrow, and you ought not to go either.

FLORENCIO. But, wife!

ZURITA. Ah! The unveiling. . . . I had forgotten to mention it.

CAROLINA. To mention what?

ZURITA. It has been postponed.

FLORENCIO. How?

ZURITA. The committee became nervous at the last moment over the protests against the nudes. After seeing the photographs many ladies declined to participate. At last the sculptor was convinced, and he has consented to withdraw the statue of Truth altogether, and to put a tunic upon Industry, while Commerce is to have a bathing-suit.

CAROLINA. That will be splendid!

ZURITA. All this, however, will require several days, and by that time everything will have been forgotten.

[*Casalonga reënters with the books. He is completely out of breath and drops them suddenly upon the floor, where they raise a tremendous cloud of dust.*]

CAROLINA. *Ay!*

CASALONGA. I had you scared! At your service. . . . Here is the entire edition. I returned him his thousand pesetas — I declined to make it another penny. I told you that would be all that was necessary. I am a man of my word. Now it is up to you. No more could be asked! I am your friend and have said enough. I shall have to find some other outlet for my activities. That will be all for to-day.

FLORENCIO. I will give you two thousand pesetas. But beware of a second edition!

CASALONGA. Don't begin to worry so soon. With this money I shall have enough to be decent at least — at least

for two months. You know me, señora. I am Florencio's most intimate friend, as I was Patricio's most intimate friend, which is to say one of the most intimate friends you ever had.

CAROLINA. Yes, I remember.

CASALONGA. But I have changed since that time.

FLORENCIO. Not a bit of it! He is just the same.

CASALONGA. Yes, the change is in you. You are the same, only you have improved. [*To Carolina.*] I am amazed at the opulence of your beauty, which a fortunate marriage has greatly enhanced. Have you any children?

CAROLINA. No. . . .

CASALONGA. You are going to have some.

FLORENCIO. Flatterer!

CASALONGA. But I must leave before night: there is nothing for me to do here.

FLORENCIO. No, you have attended to everything. I shall send it after you to the hotel.

CASALONGA. Add a little while you are about it to cover expenses — by way of a finishing touch.

FLORENCIO. Oh, very well!

CASALONGA. That will be all. Señora, if I can be of service. . . . My good Zurita! Friend Florencio! Before I die I hope to see you again.

FLORENCIO. Yes! Unless I die first.

CASALONGA. I know how you feel. You take the worst end for yourself.

FLORENCIO. Allow me that consolation.

CASALONGA. God be with you, my friend. Adios! Rest in peace. How different are our fates! Life to you is sweet. You have everything — love, riches, satisfaction. While I — I laugh through my tears!

[*Goes out.*]

CAROLINA. That cost you money.

FLORENCIO. What else did you expect? I gave up to avoid a scandal upon your account. I could see that you were nervous. I would have fought if I could have had my way; I would have carried matters to the last extreme. Zurita will tell you so.

CAROLINA. I always said that monument would cost us dear.

FLORENCIO. Obviously! Two thousand pesetas now, besides the twenty-five thousand which I subscribed for the monument, to say nothing of my uniform as Chief of Staff which I had ordered for the unveiling. Then there are the banquets to the delegates. . . .

ZURITA. Glory is always more expensive than it is worth.

FLORENCIO. It is not safe to be famous even at second hand.

CAROLINA. But you are not sorry?

FLORENCIO. No, my Carolina, the glory of being your husband far outweighs in my eyes the disadvantages of being the husband of his widow.

[*Curtain.*]

A SUNNY MORNING

A Comedy

By Serafin and Joaquin Alvarez Quintero

Translated from the Spanish by Lucretia Xavier Floyd.

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CHARACTERS

Doña Laura.
Petra [*her maid*].
Don Gonzalo.
Juanito [*his servant*].

Time: *The Present.*

Published by special arrangement with Mrs. Lucretia Xavier Floyd and Mr. John Garrett Underhill, the Society of Spanish Authors. Applications for permission to produce this play must be made to the Society of Spanish Authors, Room 62, 20 Nassau Street, New York.

A SUNNY MORNING

A Comedy

By Serafin and Joaquin Alvarez Quintero

[*Scene laid in a retired part of a park in Madrid, Spain. A bench at right. Bright, sunny morning in autumn. Doña Laura, a handsome old lady of about 70, with white hair and of very refined appearance, although elderly, her bright eyes and entire manner prove her mental facilities are unimpaired. She enters accompanied by her maid Petra, upon whose arm she leans with one hand, while the other holds a parasol which she uses as a cane.*]

Doña Laura. I am so glad we have arrived. I feared my seat would be occupied. What a beautiful morning!

Petra. The sun is rather hot.

Doña Laura. Yes, to you who are only 20 years old. [*She sits down on the bench.*] Oh, I feel more tired to-day than usual. [*Noticing Petra, who seems impatient.*] Go, if you wish to chat with your guard.

Petra. He is not my guard, Señora; he belongs to the park.

Doña Laura. He belongs more to you than to the park. Go seek him, but remain within calling distance.

Petra. I see him over there waiting for me.

Doña Laura. Do not remain away more than ten minutes.

Petra. Very well, Señora. [*Walks toward right, but is detained.*]

Doña Laura. Wait a moment.

Petra. What does the Señora wish?

Doña Laura. You are carrying away the bread crumbs.

Petra. Very true. I don't know where my head is.

Doña Laura [*smiling*]. I do. It is where your heart is — with your guard.

Petra. Here, Señora. [*She hands Doña Laura a small bag. Exit Petra.*]

Doña Laura. Adios. [*Glancing toward trees.*] Here come the rogues. They know just when to expect me. [*She rises, walks toward right, throws three handfuls of bread crumbs.*] These are for the most daring, these for the gluttons, and these for the little ones which are the biggest rogues. Ha, ha. [*She returns to her seat and watches with a pleased expression, the pigeons feeding.*] There, that big one is always the first. That little fellow is the least timid. I believe he would eat from my hand. That one takes his piece and flies to that branch. He is a philosopher. But from where do they all come? It seems as if the news had been carried. Ha, ha. Don't quarrel. There is enough for all. To-morrow I'll bring more.

[*Enter Don Gonzalo and Juanito. Don Gonzalo is an old gentleman over 70, gouty and impatient. He leans upon Juanito's arm and drags his feet along as he walks. He displays ill temper.*]

Don Gonzalo. Idling their time away. They should be saying Mass.

Juanito. You can sit here, Señor, There is only a lady.

[*Doña Laura turns her head and listens to the dialogue.*]

Don Gonzalo. I won't, Juanito. I want a bench to myself.

Juanito. But there is none.

Don Gonzalo. But that one over there is mine.

Juanito. But there are three priests sitting there.

Don Gonzalo. Let them get up. Have they gone, Juanito?

Juanito. No, indeed. They are in animated conversation.

Don Gonzalo. Just as if they were glued to the seat. No hope of their leaving. Come this way, Juanito. [*They walk toward birds.*]

Doña Laura [*indignantly*]. Look out!

Don Gonzalo [*turning his head*]. Are you talking to me, Señora?

Doña Laura. Yes, to you.

DON GONZALO. What do you wish?

DOÑA LAURA. You have scared away the birds who were feeding on bread crumbs.

DON GONZALO. What do I care about the birds.

DOÑA LAURA. But I do.

DON GONZALO. This is a public park.

DOÑA LAURA. Then why do you complain that the priests have taken your bench?

DON GONZALO. Señora, we have not been introduced to each other. I do not know why you take the liberty of addressing me. Come, Juanito. [*Both exit.*]

DOÑA LAURA. What an ill-natured old man. Why must some people get so fussy and cross when they reach a certain age? I am glad. He lost that bench, too. Serves him right for scaring the birds. He is furious. Yes, yes; find a seat if you can. Poor fellow! He is wiping the perspiration from his face. Here he comes. A carriage would not raise more dust than he does with his feet.

[*Enter Don Gonzalo and Juanito.*]

DON GONZALO. Have the priests gone yet, Juanito?

JUANITO. No, indeed, Señor. They are still there.

DON GONZALO. The authorities should place more benches here for these sunny mornings. Well, I suppose I must resign myself and sit on the same bench with the old lady. [*Muttering to himself, he sits at the extreme end of Doña Laura's bench and looks at her indignantly. Touches his hat as he greets her.*] Good morning.

DOÑA LAURA. What, you here again?

DON GONZALO. I repeat that we have not been introduced.

DOÑA LAURA. I am responding to your greeting.

DON GONZALO. Good morning should be answered by good morning, and that is what you should have said.

DOÑA LAURA. And you should have asked permission to sit on this bench which is mine.

DON GONZALO. The benches here are public property.

DOÑA LAURA. Why, you said the one the priests occupied was yours.

DON GONZALO. Very well, very well. I have nothing more to say. [*Between his teeth.*] Doting old woman. She should be at home with her knitting and counting her beads.

DOÑA LAURA. Don't grumble any more. I'm not going to leave here just to please you.

DON GONZALO [*brushing the dust from his shoes with his handkerchief*]. If the grounds were sprinkled more freely it would be an improvement.

DOÑA LAURA. What an idea, to brush your shoes with your handkerchief.

DON GONZALO. What?

DOÑA LAURA. Do you use a shoe brush as a handkerchief?

DON GONZALO. By what right do you criticize my actions?

DOÑA LAURA. By the rights of a neighbor.

DON GONZALO. Juanito, give me my book. I do not care to hear any more nonsense.

DOÑA LAURA. You are very polite.

DON GONZALO. Pardon me, Señora, but if you did not interfere with what does not concern you.

DOÑA LAURA. I generally say what I think.

DON GONZALO. And say more than you should. Give me the book, Juanito.

JUANITO. Here it is, Señor. [*Juanito takes book from pocket, hands it to Don Gonzalo; then exits.*]

[*Don Gonzalo, casting indignant glances at Doña Laura, puts on an enormous pair of glasses, takes from his pocket a reading-glass, adjusts both to suit him, opens his book.*]

DOÑA LAURA. I thought you were going to take out a telescope now.

DON GONZALO. What, again?

DOÑA LAURA. Your sight must be fine.

DON GONZALO. Many times better than yours.

DOÑA LAURA. Yes, it is very evident.

DON GONZALO. Many hares and partridges could bear testimony to my words.

DOÑA LAURA. Do you hunt?

DON GONZALO. I did, and even now —

DOÑA LAURA. Oh, yes, of course.

DON GONZALO. Yes, Señora. Every Sunday I take my gun and dog, you understand, and go to one of my properties near Aravaca, just to kill time.

DOÑA LAURA. Yes, to kill time. That is all you can kill.

DON GONZALO. Do you think so? I could show you a wild boar's head in my study —

DOÑA LAURA. Yes, and I could show you a tiger's skin in my boudoir. What an argument!

DON GONZALO. Very well, Señora, please allow me to read. I do not feel like having more conversation.

DOÑA LAURA. Well, keep quiet then.

DON GONZALO. But first I shall take a pinch of snuff. [*Takes out snuff box.*] Will you have some? [*Offers box to Doña Laura.*]

DOÑA LAURA. If it is good?

DON GONZALO. It is of the finest. You will like it.

DOÑA LAURA [*taking pinch of snuff*]. It clears my head.

DON GONZALO. And mine.

DOÑA LAURA. Do you sneeze?

DON GONZALO. Yes, Señora, three times.

DOÑA LAURA. And so do I. What a coincidence!

[*After taking the snuff, they await the sneezes, making grimaces, and then sneeze alternately three times each.*]

DON GONZALO. There, I feel better.

DOÑA LAURA. So do I. [*Aside.*] The snuff has made peace between us.

DON GONZALO. You will excuse me if I read aloud?

DOÑA LAURA. Read as you please; you will not disturb me.

DON GONZALO [*reading*]. "All love is sad, but sad and all, it is the best thing that exists." That is from Campoamor.

DOÑA LAURA. Ah!

DON GONZALO [*reading*]. "The daughters of the mothers I once loved, kiss me now as they would kiss a wooden image." Those lines are in the humorous vein.

DOÑA LAURA [*laughing*]. So I see.

DON GONZALO. There are some beautiful poems in this book. Listen: "Twenty years have passed. He returns."

DOÑA LAURA. You cannot imagine how it affects me to see you reading with all those glasses.

DON GONZALO. Can it be possible that you read without requiring any?

DOÑA LAURA. Certainly.

DON GONZALO. At your age? You must be jesting.

DOÑA LAURA. Pass me the book, please. [*takes book, reads aloud.*] "Twenty years have passed. He returns. And each upon beholding the other exclaims — Can it be possible that this is he? Merciful heavens, can this be she?"

[*Doña Laura returns book to Don Gonzalo.*]

DON GONZALO. Indeed, you are to be envied for your wonderful eyesight.

DOÑA LAURA [*aside*]. I knew the lines from memory.

DON GONZALO. I am very fond of good verse, very fond. I even composed some in my youth.

DOÑA LAURA. Good ones?

DON GONZALO. Of all kinds. I was a great friend of Espronceda, Zorrilla, Becquer and others. I first met Zorrilla in America.

DOÑA LAURA. Why, have you been in America?

DON GONZALO. Several times. The first time I went I was only six years old.

DOÑA LAURA. Columbus must have carried you in one of his caravels.

DON GONZALO [*laughing*]. Not quite as bad as that. I am old, I admit, but I did not know Ferdinand and Isabella. [*They both laugh.*] I was also a great friend of Campoamor. I met him in Valencia. I am a native of that city.

DOÑA LAURA. You are?

DON GONZALO. I was brought up there and there I spent my early youth. Have you ever visited that city?

DOÑA LAURA. Yes, Señor. Not far from Valencia there was a mansion that if still there, should retain memories of me. I spent there several seasons. This was many, many years ago. It was near the sea, concealed among lemon and orange trees. They called it — let me see, what did they call it? — "Maricela."

DON GONZALO [*startled*]. Maricela?

DOÑA LAURA. Maricela. Is the name familiar to you?

DON GONZALO. Yes, very familiar. If my memory serves me right, for we forget as we grow old, there lived in that mansion the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, and I assure you I have seen a few. Let me see — what was her name? Laura — Laura — Laura Lorente.

DOÑA LAURA [*startled*]. Laura Lorente?

DON GONZALO. Yes. [*They look at each other strangely.*]

DOÑA LAURA [*recovering herself*]. Nothing. You reminded me of my best friend.

DON GONZALO. How strange!

DOÑA LAURA. It is strange. She was called "The Silver Maiden."

DON GONZALO. Precisely, "The Silver Maiden." By that name she was known in that locality. I seem to see her as if she were before me now, at that window of the red roses. Do you remember that window?

DOÑA LAURA. Yes, I remember. It was that of her room.

DON GONZALO. She spent many hours there. I mean in my days.

DOÑA LAURA [*sighing*]. And in mine, too.

DON GONZALO. She was ideal. Fair as a lily, jet black hair and black eyes, with a very sweet expression. She seemed to cast a radiance wherever she was. Her figure was beautiful, perfect. "What forms of sovereign beauty God models in human sculpture!" She was a dream.

DOÑA LAURA [*aside*]. If you but knew that dream was now by your side, you would realize what dreams are worth. [*Aloud.*] She was very unfortunate and had a sad love affair.

DON GONZALO. Very sad. [*They look at each other.*]

DOÑA LAURA. You know of it?

DON GONZALO. Yes.

DOÑA LAURA [*aside*]. Strange are the ways of Providence! This man is my early lover.

DON GONZALO. The gallant lover, if we refer to the same affair —

DOÑA LAURA. To the duel?

DON GONZALO. Precisely, to the duel. The gallant lover was — my cousin, of whom I was very fond.

DOÑA LAURA. Oh, yes, a cousin. My friend told me in one of her letters the story of that love affair, truly romantic. He, your cousin, passed by on horseback every morning by the rose path under her window, and tossed up to her balcony a bouquet of flowers which she caught.

DON GONZALO. And later in the afternoon, the gallant horseman would return by the same path, and catch the bouquet of flowers she would toss him. Was it not so?

DOÑA LAURA. Yes. They wanted to marry her to a merchant whom she did not fancy.

DON GONZALO. And one night, when my cousin watched under her window to hear her sing, this new lover presented himself unexpectedly.

DOÑA LAURA. And insulted your cousin.

DON GONZALO. There was a quarrel.

DOÑA LAURA. And later a duel.

DON GONZALO. Yes, at sunrise, on the beach, and the merchant was badly wounded. My cousin had to conceal himself for a few days and later to fly.

DOÑA LAURA. You seem to know the story perfectly.

DON GONZALO. And so do you.

DOÑA LAURA. I have told you that my friend related it to me.

DON GONZALO. And my cousin to me. [*Aside.*] This woman is Laura. What a strange fate has brought us together again.

DOÑA LAURA [*aside*]. He does not suspect who I am. Why tell him? Let him preserve his illusion.

DON GONZALO [*aside*]. She does not suspect she is talking to her old lover. How can she? I will not reveal my identity.

DOÑA LAURA. And was it you, by chance, who advised your cousin to forget Laura?

DON GONZALO. Why, my cousin never forgot her for one instant.

DOÑA LAURA. How do you account, then, for his conduct?

DON GOZALO. I will explain. The young man first took refuge in my house, fearful of the consequences of his duel with that man, so much beloved in that locality. From my home he went to Seville, then came to Madrid. He wrote to Laura many letters, some in verse. But, undoubtedly, they were intercepted by her parents, for she never answered them. Gonzalo then, in despair, and believing his loved one lost to him forever, joined the army, went to Africa, and there, in a trench, met a glorious death, grasping the flag of Spain and repeating the name of his beloved — Laura — Laura — Laura.

DOÑA LAURA [*aside*]. What an atrocious lie!

DON GONZALO [*aside*]. I could not have killed myself in a more glorious manner.

DOÑA LAURA. Such a calamity must have caused you the greatest sorrow.

DON GONZALO. Yes, indeed, Señora. As great as if it were a brother. I presume though, that on the contrary, Laura in a short time was chasing butterflies in her garden, indifferent to everything.

DOÑA LAURA. No, Señor, no indeed.

DON GONZALO. It is usually a woman's way.

DOÑA LAURA. Even if you consider it a woman's way, the "Silver Maiden" was not of that disposition. My friend awaited news for days, months, a year, and no letter came. One afternoon, just at sunset, and as the first stars were appearing, she was seen to leave the house, and with quick steps, wend her way toward the beach, that beach where her beloved had risked his life. She wrote his name on the sand, then sat upon a rock, her gaze fixed upon the horizon. The waves murmured their eternal monologue and slowly covered the rock where the maiden sat. Shall I tell you the rest? — The tide rose and carried her off to sea.

DON GONZALO. Good heavens!

DOÑA LAURA. The fishermen of that sea-coast who tell the story, affirm that it was a long time before the waves washed away that name written on the sand. [*Aside.*] You will not get ahead of me in inventing a romantic death.

DON GONZALO [*aside*]. She lies more than I do.

DOÑA LAURA. Poor Laura!

DON GONZALO. Poor Gonzalo!

DOÑA LAURA [*aside*] I will not tell him that in two years I married another.

DON GONZALO [*aside*]. I will not tell her that in three months I went to Paris with a ballet dancer.

DOÑA LAURA. What strange pranks Fate plays! Here you and I, complete strangers, met by chance, and in discussing the romance of friends of long ago, we have been conversing as we were old friends.

DON GONZALO. Yes, it is strange, considering we commenced our conversation quarreling.

DOÑA LAURA. Because you scared away the birds.

DON GONZALO. I was in a bad temper.

DOÑA LAURA. Yes, that was evident. [*Sweetly.*] Are you coming to-morrow?

DON GONZALO. Most certainly, if it is a sunny morning. And not only will I not scare away the birds, but will also bring them bread crumbs.

DOÑA LAURA. Thank you very much. They are very interesting and deserve to be noticed. I wonder where my maid is? [*Doña Laura rises; Don Gonzalo also rises.*] What time can it be? [*Doña Laura walks toward left.*]

DON GONZALO. It is nearly twelve o'clock. Where can that scamp Juanito be? [*Walks toward right.*]

DOÑA LAURA. There she is talking with her guard. [*Signals with her hand for her maid to approach.*]

DON GONZALO [*looking at Laura, whose back is turned. Aside*]. No, no, I will not reveal my identity. I am a grotesque figure now. Better that she recall the gallant horseman who passed daily under her window and tossed her flowers.

DOÑA LAURA. How reluctant she is to leave him. Here she comes.

DON GONZALO. But where can Juanito be? He has probably forgotten everything in the society of some nursemaid. [*Looks toward right and signals with his hand.*]

DOÑA LAURA [*looking at Gonzalo, whose back is turned. Aside*]. No, I will not tell him I am Laura. I am too sadly altered. It is better he should remember me as the blackeyed girl who tossed him flowers as he passed through the rose path in that garden.

[*Juanito enters by right: Petra by left. She has a bunch of violets in her hand.*]

DOÑA LAURA. Well, Petra, I thought you were never coming.

DON GONZALO. But, Juanito, what delayed you so? It is very late.

PETRA [*handing violets to Doña Laura*]. My lover gave me these violets for you, Señora.

DOÑA LAURA. How very nice of him. Thank him for me. They are very fragrant. [*As she takes the violets from her maid, a few loose ones drop to the ground.*]

DON GONZALO. My dear Señora, this has been a great honor and pleasure.

DOÑA LAURA. And it has also been a pleasure to me.

DON GONZALO. Good-by until to-morrow.

DOÑA LAURA. Until to-morrow.

DON GONZALO. If it is a sunny day.

DOÑA LAURA. If it is a sunny day. Will you go to your bench?

DON GONZALO. No, Señora, I will come to this, if you do not object?

DOÑA LAURA. This bench is at your disposal. [*Both laugh.*]

DON GONZALO. And I will surely bring the bread crumbs. [*Both laugh again.*]

DOÑA LAURA. Until to-morrow.

DON GONZALO. Until to-morrow.

[*Laura walks away on her maid's arm toward right. Gonzalo, before leaving with Juanito, trembling and with a great effort, stoops to pick up the violets Laura dropped. Just then, Laura turns her head and sees him pick up flowers.*]

JUANITO. What are you doing, Señor?

DON GONZALO. Wait, Juanito, wait.

DOÑA LAURA [*aside*]. There is no doubt. It is he.

DON GONZALO [*walks toward left. Aside*]. There can be no mistake. It is she.

[*Doña Laura and Don Gonzalo wave farewells to each other from a distance.*]

DOÑA LAURA. Merciful heavens! This is Gonzalo.

DON GONZALO. And to think that this is Laura.

[*Before disappearing they give one last smiling look at each other.*]

[*Curtain.*]

THE CREDITOR

A Play

By August Strindberg

PERSONS

Thelka.
Adolf [*her husband, a painter*].
Gustav [*her divorced husband*].
Two Ladies, a Waiter.

THE CREDITOR

A Play

By August Strindberg

[Scene: *A small watering-place. Time, the present. Stage directions with reference to the actors.*

A drawing-room in a watering-place; furnished as above.

Door in the middle, with a view out on the sea; side doors right and left; by the side door on the left the button of an electric bell; on the right of the door in the center a table, with a decanter of water and a glass. On the left of the door in the center a what-not; on the right a fireplace in front; on the right a round table and arm-chair; on the left a sofa, a square table, a settee; on the table a small pedestal with a draped figure — papers, books, arm-chairs. Only the items of furniture which are introduced into the action are referred to in the above plan. The rest of the scenery remains unaffected. It is summer, and the day-time.]

Scene I.

[*Adolf sits on the settee on the left of the square table; his stick is propped up near him.*]

Adolf. And it's you I've got to thank for all this.

Gustav [*walks up and down on the right, smoking a cigar*]. Oh, nonsense.

Adolf. Indeed, I have. Why, the first day after my wife went away, I lay on my sofa like a cripple and gave myself up to my depression; it was as though she had taken my crutches, and I couldn't move from the spot. A few days went by, and I cheered up and began to pull myself together. The delirious nightmares which my brain had produced, went away. My head became cooler and cooler. A thought which I once had came to the surface again. My desire to work, my impulse to create, woke up. My eye got back again its capacity for sound sharp observation. You came, old man.

Gustav. Yes, you were in pretty low water, old man, when I came across you, and you went about on crutches. Of course, that doesn't prove that it was simply my presence that helped so much to your recovery: you needed quiet, and you wanted masculine companionship.

Adolf. You're right in that, as you are in everything else you say. I used to have it in the old days. But after my marriage it seemed unnecessary. I was satisfied with the friend of my heart whom I had chosen. All the same I soon got into fresh sets, and made many new acquaintances. But then my wife got jealous. She wanted to have me quite to herself; but much worse than that, my friends wanted to have her quite to themselves — and so I was left out in the cold with my jealousy.

Gustav. You were predisposed to this illness, you know that.

[*He passes on the left behind the square table and comes to Adolf's left.*]

Adolf. I was afraid of losing her — and tried to prevent it. Are you surprised at it? I was never afraid for a moment that she'd be unfaithful to me.

Gustav. What husband ever was afraid?

Adolf. Strange, isn't it? All I troubled about was simply this — about friends getting influence over her and so being able indirectly to acquire power over me — and I couldn't bear that at all.

Gustav. So you and your wife didn't have quite identical views?

Adolf. I've told you so much, you may as well know everything — my wife is an independent character. [*Gustav*

laughs.] What are you laughing at, old man?

GUSTAV. Go on, go on. She's an independent character, is she?

ADOLF. She won't take anything from me.

GUSTAV. But she does from everybody else?

ADOLF [*after a pause*]. Yes. And I've felt about all this, that the only reason why my views were so awfully repugnant to her, was because they were mine, not because they appeared absurd on their intrinsic merits. For it often happened that she'd trot out my old ideas, and champion them with gusto as her own. Why, it even came about that one of my friends gave her ideas which he had borrowed direct from me. She found them delightful; she found everything delightful that didn't come from me.

GUSTAV. In other words, you're not truly happy.

ADOLF. Oh yes, I am. The woman whom I desired is mine, and I never wished for any other.

GUSTAV. Do you never wish to be free either?

ADOLF. I wouldn't like to go quite so far as that. Of course the thought crops up now and again, how calmly I should be able to live if I were free — but she scarcely leaves me before I immediately long for her again, as though she were my arm, my leg. Strange. When I'm alone I sometimes feel as though she didn't have any real self of her own, as though she were a part of my ego, a piece out of my inside, that stole away all my will, all my *joie de vivre.* Why, my very marrow itself, to use an anatomical expression, is situated in her; that's what it seems like.

GUSTAV. Viewing the matter broadly, that seems quite plausible.

ADOLF. Nonsense. An independent person like she is, with such a tremendous lot of personal views, and when I met her, what was I then? Nothing. An artistic child which she brought up.

GUSTAV. But afterwards you developed her intellect and educated her, didn't you?

ADOLF. No; her growth remained stationary, and I shot up.

GUSTAV. Yes; it's really remarkable, but her literary talent already began to deteriorate after her first book, or, to put it as charitably as possible, it didn't develop any further. [*He sits down opposite Adolf on the sofa on the left.*] Of course she then had the most promising subject-matter — for of course she drew the portrait of her first husband — you never knew him, old man? He must have been an unmitigated ass.

ADOLF. I've never seen him. He was away for more than six months, but the good fellow must have been as perfect an ass as they're made, judging by her description — you can take it from me, old man, that her description wasn't exaggerated.

GUSTAV. Quite; but why did she marry him?

ADOLF. She didn't know him then. People only get to know one another afterwards, don't you know.

GUSTAV. But, according to that, people have no business to marry until — Well, the man was a tyrant, obviously.

ADOLF. Obviously?

GUSTAV. What husband wouldn't be? [*Casually.*] Why, old chap, you're as much a tyrant as any of the others.

ADOLF. Me? I? Well, I allow my wife to come and go as she jolly well pleases!

GUSTAV [*stands up*]. Pah! a lot of good that is. I didn't suppose you kept her locked up. [*He turns round behind the square table and comes over to Adolf on the right.*] Don't you mind if she's out all night?

ADOLF. I should think I do.

GUSTAV. Look here. [*Resuming his earlier tone.*] Speaking as man to man, it simply makes you ridiculous.

ADOLF. Ridiculous? Can a man's trusting his wife make him ridiculous?

GUSTAV. Of course it can. And you've been so for some time. No doubt about it.

[*He walks round the round table on the right.*]

ADOLF [*excitedly*]. Me? I'd have preferred to be anything but that. I must put matters right.

GUSTAV. Don't you get so excited, otherwise you'll get an attack again.

ADOLF [*after a pause*]. Why doesn't she look ridiculous when I stay out all night?

GUSTAV. Why? Don't you bother about that. That's how the matter stands, and while you're fooling about moping, the mischief is done.

[*He goes behind the square table, and walks behind the sofa.*]

ADOLF. What mischief?

GUSTAV. Her husband, you know, was a tyrant, and she simply married him in order to be free. For what other way is there for a girl to get free, than by getting the so-called husband to act as cover?

ADOLF. Why, of course.

GUSTAV. And now, old man, you're the cover.

ADOLF. I?

GUSTAV. As her husband.

ADOLF [*looks absent*].

GUSTAV. Am I not right?

ADOLF [*uneasily*]. I don't know. [*Pause.*] A man lives for years on end with a woman without coming to a clear conclusion about the woman herself, or how she stands in relation to his own way of looking at things. And then all of a sudden a man begins to reflect — and then there's no stopping. Gustav, old man, you're my friend, the only friend I've had for a long time, and this last week you've given me back all my life and pluck. It seems as though you'd radiated your magnetism over me. You were the watchmaker who repairs the works in my brain, and tightened the spring. [*Pause.*] Don't you see yourself how much more lucidly I think, how much more connectedly I speak, and at times it almost seems as though my voice had got back the timbre it used to have in the old days.

GUSTAV. I think so, too. What can be the cause of it?

ADOLF. I don't know. Perhaps one gets accustomed to talk more softly to women. Thekla, at any rate, was always ragging me because I shrieked.

GUSTAV. And then you subsided into a minor key, and allowed yourself to be put in the corner.

ADOLF. Don't say that. [*Reflectively.*] That wasn't the worst of it. Let's talk of something else — where was I then — I've got it. [*Gustav turns round again at the back of the square table and comes to Adolf on his right.*] You came here, old man, and opened my eyes to the mysteries of my art. As a matter of fact, I've been feeling for some time that my interest in painting was lessening, because it didn't provide me with a proper medium to express what I had in me; but when you gave me the reason for this state of affairs, and explained to me why painting could not possibly be the right form for the artistic impulse of the age, then I saw the true light and I recognized that it would be from now onwards impossible for me to create in colors.

GUSTAV. Are you so certain, old man, that you won't be able to paint any more, that you won't have any relapse?

ADOLF. Quite. I have tested myself. When I went to bed the evening after our conversation I reviewed your chain of argument point by point, and felt convinced that it was sound. But the next morning, when my head cleared again, after the night's sleep, the thought flashed through me like lightning that you might be mistaken all the same. I jumped up, and snatched up a brush and palette, in order to paint, but — just think of it! — it was all up. I was no longer capable of any illusion. The whole thing was nothing but blobs of color, and I was horrified at the thought. I could never have believed I could convert any one else to the belief that painted canvas was anything else except painted canvas. The scales had fallen from my eyes, and I could as much paint again as I could become a child again.

GUSTAV. You realized then that the real striving of the age, its aspiration for reality, for actuality, can only find a corresponding medium in sculpture, which gives bodies extension in the three dimensions.

ADOLF [*hesitating*]. The three dimensions? Yes — in a word, bodies.

GUSTAV. And now you want to become a sculptor? That means that you were a sculptor really from the beginning; you got off the line somehow, so you only needed a guide to direct you back again to the right track. I say, when you work now, does the great joy of creation come over you?

ADOLF. Now, I live again.

GUSTAV. May I see what you're doing?

ADOLF [*undraping a figure on the small table*]. A female figure.

GUSTAV [*probing*]. Without a model, and yet so lifelike?

ADOLF [*heavily*]. Yes, but it is like somebody; extraordinary how this woman is in me, just as I am in her.

GUSTAV. That last is not so extraordinary — do you know anything about transfusion?

ADOLF. Blood transfusion? Yes.

GUSTAV. It seems to me that you've allowed your veins to be opened a bit too much. The examination of this figure clears up many things which I'd previously only surmised. You loved her infinitely?

ADOLF. Yes; so much that I could never tell whether she is I, or I am her; when she laughed I laughed; when she cried I cried, and when — just imagine it — our child came into the world I suffered the same as she did.

GUSTAV [*stepping a little to the right*]. Look here, old chap, I am awfully sorry to have to tell you, but the symptoms of epilepsy are already manifesting themselves.

ADOLF [*crushed*]. In me? What makes you say so.

GUSTAV. Because I watched these symptoms in a younger brother of mine, who eventually died of excess.

[*He sits down in the arm-chair by the circular table.*]

ADOLF. How did it manifest itself — that disease, I mean?

[*Gustav gesticulates vividly; Adolf watches with strained attention, and involuntarily imitates Gustav's gestures.*]

GUSTAV. A ghastly sight. If you feel at all off color, I'd rather not harrow you by describing the symptoms.

ADOLF [*nervously*]. Go on; go on.

GUSTAV. Well, it's like this. Fate had given the youngster for a wife a little innocent, with kiss-curls, dove-like eyes, and a baby face, from which there spoke the pure soul of an angel. In spite of that, the little one managed to appropriate the man's prerogative.

ADOLF. What is that?

GUSTAV. Initiative, of course; and the inevitable result was that the angel came precious near taking him away to heaven. He first had to be on the cross and feel the nails in his flesh.

ADOLF [*suffocating*]. Tell me, what was it like?

GUSTAV [*slowly*]. There were times when he and I would sit quite quietly by each other and chat, and then — I'd scarcely been speaking a few minutes before his face became ashy white, his limbs were paralyzed, and his thumbs turned in towards the palm of the hand. [*With a gesture.*] Like that! [*Adolf imitates the gesture.*] And his eyes were shot with blood, and he began to chew, do you see, like this. [*He moves his lips as though chewing; Adolf imitates him again.*] The saliva stuck in his throat; the chest contracted as though it had been compressed by screws on a joiner's bench; there was a flicker in the pupils like gas jets; foam spurted from his mouth, and he sank gently back in the chair as though he were drowning. Then —

ADOLF [*hissing*]. Stop!

GUSTAV. Then — are you unwell?

ADOLF. Yes.

GUSTAV [*gets up and fetches a glass of water from the table on the right near the center door*]. Here, drink this, and let's change the subject.

ADOLF [*drinks, limp*]. Thanks; go on.

GUSTAV. Good! When he woke up he had no idea what had taken place. [*He takes the glass back to the table.*] He had simply lost consciousness. Hasn't that ever happened to you?

ADOLF. Now and again I have attacks of dizziness. The doctor puts it down to anæmia.

GUSTAV [*on the right of Adolf*]. That's just how the thing starts, mark you. Take it from me, you're in danger of contracting epilepsy; if you aren't on your guard, if you don't live a careful and abstemious life, all round.

ADOLF. What can I do to effect that?

GUSTAV. Above all, you must exercise the most complete continence.

ADOLF. For how long?

GUSTAV. Six months at least.

ADOLF. I can't do it. It would upset all our life together.

GUSTAV. Then it's all up with you.

ADOLF. I can't do it.

GUSTAV. You can't save your own life? But tell me, as you've taken me into your confidence so far, haven't you any other wound that hurts you? — some other secret trouble in this multifarious

life of ours, with all its numerous opportunities for jars and complications? There is usually more than one *motif* which is responsible for a discord. Haven't you got a skeleton in the cupboard, old chap, which you hide even from yourself? You told me a minute ago you'd given your child to people to look after. Why didn't you keep it with you?

[*He goes behind the square table on the left and then behind the sofa.*]

ADOLF [*covers the figure on the small table with a cloth*]. It was my wife's wish to have it nursed outside the house.

GUSTAV. The motive? Don't be afraid.

ADOLF. Because when the kid was three years old she thought it began to look like her first husband.

GUSTAV. Re-a-lly? Ever seen the first husband?

ADOLF. No, never. I just once cast a cursory glance over a bad photograph, but I couldn't discover any likeness.

GUSTAV. Oh, well, photographs are never like, and besides, his type of face may have changed with time. By the by, didn't that make you at all jealous?

ADOLF. Not a bit. The child was born a year after our marriage, and the husband was traveling when I met Thekla, here — in this watering-place — in this very house. That's why we come here every summer.

GUSTAV. Then all suspicion on your part was out of the question? But so far as the intrinsic facts of the matter are concerned you needn't be jealous at all, because it not infrequently happens that the children of a widow who marries again are like the deceased husband. Very awkward business, no question about it; and that's why, don't you know, the widows are burned alive in India. Tell me, now, didn't you ever feel jealous of him, of the survival of his memory in your own self? Wouldn't it have rather gone against the grain if he had just met you when you were out for a walk, and, looking straight at Thekla, said "We," instead of "I"? "We."

ADOLF. I can't deny that the thought has haunted me.

GUSTAV [*sits down opposite Adolf on the sofa on the left*]. I thought as much, and you'll never get away from it. There are discords in life, you know, which never get resolved, so you must stuff your ears with wax, and work. Work, get older, and heap up over the coffin a mass of new impressions, and then the corpse will rest in peace.

ADOLF. Excuse my interrupting you — but it is extraordinary at times how your way of speaking reminds me of Thekla. You've got a trick, old man, of winking with your right eye as though you were counting, and your gaze has the same power over me as hers has.

GUSTAV. No, really?

ADOLF. And now you pronounce your "No, really?" in the same indifferent tone that she does. "No, really?" is one of her favorite expressions, too, you know.

GUSTAV. Perhaps there is a distant relationship between us: all men and women are related of course. Anyway, there's no getting away from the strangeness of it, and it will be interesting for me to make the acquaintance of your wife, so as to observe this remarkable characteristic.

ADOLF. But just think of this, she doesn't take a single expression from me; why, she seems rather to make a point of avoiding all my special tricks of speech; all the same, I have seen her make use of one of my gestures; but it is quite the usual thing in married life for a husband and a wife to develop the so-called marriage likeness.

GUSTAV. Quite. But look here now. [*He stands up.*] That woman has never loved you.

ADOLF. Nonsense.

GUSTAV. Pray excuse me, woman's love consists simply in this — in taking in, in receiving. She does not love the man from whom she takes nothing: she has never loved you.

[*He turns round behind the square table and walks to Adolf's right.*]

ADOLF. I suppose you don't think that she'd be able to love more than once?

GUSTAV. No. Once bit, twice shy. After the first time, one keeps one's eyes open, but you have never been really bitten yet. You be careful of those who have; they're dangerous customers.

[*He goes round the circular table on the right.*]

ADOLF. What you say jabs a knife into my flesh. I've got a feeling as though

something in me were cut through, but I can do nothing to stop it all by myself, and it's as well it should be so, for abscesses will be opened in that way which would otherwise never be able to come to a head. She never loved me? Why did she marry me, then?

GUSTAV. Tell me first how it came about that she did marry you, and whether she married you or you her?

ADOLF. God knows! That's much too hard a question to be answered offhand, and how did it take place? — it took more than a day.

GUSTAV. Shall I guess?

[*He goes behind the round table, toward the left, and sits on the soft.*]

ADOLF. You'll get nothing for your pains.

GUSTAV. Not so fast! From the insight which you've given me into your own character, and that of your wife, I find it pretty easy to work out the sequence of the whole thing. Listen to me and you'll be quite convinced. [*Dispassionately and in an almost jocular tone.*] The husband happened to be traveling on study and she was alone. At first she found a pleasure in being free. Then she imagined that she felt the void, for I presume that she found it pretty boring after being alone for a fortnight. Then he turned up, and the void begins gradually to be filled — the picture of the absent man begins gradually to fade in comparison, for the simple reason that he is a long way off — you know of course the psychological algebra of distance? And when both of them, alone as they were, felt the awakening of passion, they were frightened of themselves, of him, of their own conscience. They sought for protection, skulked behind the fig-leaf, played at brother and sister, and the more sensual grew their feelings the more spiritual did they pretend their relationship really was.

ADOLF. Brother and sister! How did you know that?

GUSTAV. I just thought that was how it was. Children play at mother and father, but of course when they grow older they play at brother and sister — so as to conceal what requires concealment; they then discard their chaste desires; they play blind man's bluff till they've caught each other in some dark corner, where they're pretty sure not to be seen by anybody. [*With increased severity.*] But they are warned by their inner consciences that an eye sees them through the darkness. They are afraid — and in their panic the absent man begins to haunt their imagination — to assume monstrous proportions — to become metamorphosed — he becomes a nightmare who oppresses them in that love's young dream of theirs. He becomes the creditor [*he raps slowly on the table three times with his finger, as though knocking at the door*] who knocks at the door. They see his black hand thrust itself between them when their own are reaching after the dish of pottage. They hear his unwelcome voice in the stillness of the night, which is only broken by the beating of their own pulses. He doesn't prevent their belonging to each other, but he is enough to mar their happiness, and when they have felt this invisible power of his, and when at last they want to run away, and make their futile efforts to escape the memory which haunts them, the guilt which they have left behind, the public opinion which they are afraid of, and they lack the strength to bear their own guilt, then a scapegoat has to be exterminated and slaughtered. They posed as believers in Free Love, but they didn't have the pluck to go straight to him, to speak straight out to him and say, "We love each other." They were cowardly, and that's why the tyrant had to be assassinated. Am I not right?

ADOLF. Yes; but you're forgetting that she trained me, gave me new thoughts.

GUSTAV. I haven't forgotten it. But tell me, how was it that she wasn't able to succeed in educating the other man — in educating him into being really modern?

ADOLF. He was an utter ass.

GUSTAV. Right you are — he was an ass; but that's a fairly elastic word, and according to her description of him, in her novel, his asinine nature seemed to have consisted principally in the fact that he didn't understand her. Excuse the question, but is your wife really as deep as all that? I haven't found anything particularly profound in her writings.

ADOLF. Nor have I. I must really own that I too find it takes me all my time to understand her. It's as though

the machinery of our brains couldn't catch on to each other properly — as though something in my head got broken when I try to understand her.

GUSTAV. Perhaps you're an ass as well.

ADOLF. No, I flatter myself I'm not that, and I nearly always think that she's in the wrong — and, for the sake of argument, would you care to read this letter which I got from her to-day?

[*He takes a letter out of his pocket-book.*]

GUSTAV [*reads it cursorily*]. Hum, I seem to know the style so well.

ADOLF. Like a man's, almost.

GUSTAV. Well, at any rate I know a man who had a style like that. [*Standing up.*] I see she goes on calling you brother all the time — do you always keep up the comedy for the benefit of your two selves? Do you still keep on using the fig leaves, even though they're a trifle withered — you don't use any term of endearment?

ADOLF. No. In my view, I couldn't respect her quite so much if I did.

GUSTAV [*hands back the letter*]. I see, and she calls herself "sister" so as to inspire respect.

[*He turns around and passes the square table on Adolf's right.*]

ADOLF. I want to esteem her more than I do myself. I want her to be my better self.

GUSTAV. Oh, you be your better self; though I quite admit it's less convenient than having somebody else to do it for you. Do you want, then, to be your wife's inferior?

ADOLF. Yes, I do. I find pleasure in always allowing myself to be beaten by her a little. For instance, I taught her swimming, and it amuses me when she boasts about being better and pluckier than I am. At the beginning I simply pretended to be less skillful and courageous than she was, in order to give her pluck, but one day, God knows how it came about, I was actually the worse swimmer and the one with less pluck. It seemed as though she's taken all my grit away in real earnest.

GUSTAV. And haven't you taught her anything else?

ADOLF. Yes — but this is in confidence — I taught her spelling, because she didn't know it. Just listen to this. When she took over the correspondence of the household I gave up writing letters, and — will you believe it? — simply from lack of practice I've lost one bit of grammar after another in the course of the year. But do you think she ever remembers that she has to thank me really for her proficiency? Not for a minute. Of course, I'm the ass now.

GUSTAV. Ah, really? You're the ass now, are you?

ADOLF. I'm only joking, of course.

GUSTAV. Obviously. But this is pure cannibalism, isn't it? Do you know what I mean? Well, the savages devour their enemies so as to acquire their best qualities. Well, this woman has devoured your soul, your pluck, your knowledge.

ADOLF. And my faith. It was I who kept her up to the mark and made her write her first book.

GUSTAV [*with facial expression*]. Re-a-lly?

ADOLF. It was I who fed her up with praise, even when I thought her work was no good. It was I who introduced her into literary sets, and tried to make her feel herself in clover; defended her against criticism by my personal intervention. I blew courage into her, kept on blowing it for so long that I got out of breath myself. I gave and gave and gave — until nothing was left for me myself. Do you know — I'm going to tell you the whole story — do you know how the thing seems to me now? One's temperament is such an extraordinary thing, and when my artistic successes looked as though they would eclipse her — her prestige — I tried to buck her up by belittling myself and by representing that my art was one that was inferior to hers. I talked so much of the general insignificant rôle of my particular art, and harped on it so much, thought of so many good reasons for my contention, that one fine day I myself was soaked through and through with the worthlessness of the painter's art; so all that was left was a house of cards for you to blow down.

GUSTAV. Excuse my reminding you of what you said, but at the beginning of our conversation you were asserting that she took nothing from you.

ADOLF. She doesn't — now, at any rate; now there is nothing left to take.

GUSTAV. So the snake has gorged herself, and now she vomits.

ADOLF. Perhaps she took more from me than I knew of.

GUSTAV. Oh, you can reckon on that right enough — she took without your noticing it. [*He goes behind the square table and comes in front of the sofa.*] That's what people call stealing.

ADOLF. Then what it comes to is that she hasn't educated me at all?

GUSTAV. Rather you her. Of course she knew the trick well enough of making you believe the contrary. Might I ask how she pretended to educate you?

ADOLF. Oh — at first — hum!

GUSTAV. Well? [*He leans his arms on the table.*]

ADOLF. Well, I —

GUSTAV. No; it was she — she.

ADOLF. As a matter of fact I couldn't say which it was.

GUSTAV. You see.

ADOLF. Besides, she destroyed my faith as well, and so I went backward until you came, old chap, and gave me a new faith.

GUSTAV [*he laughs*]. In sculpture?

[*He turns round by the square table and comes to Adolf's right.*]

ADOLF [*hesitating*]. Yes.

GUSTAV. And you believed in it? — in that abstract, obsolete art from the childhood of the world. Do you believe that by means of pure form and three dimensions — no, you don't really — that you can produce an effect on the real spirit of this age of ours, that you can create illusions without color? Without color, I say. Do you believe that?

ADOLF [*tonelessly*]. No.

GUSTAV. Nor do I.

ADOLF. But why did you say you did?

GUSTAV. You make me pity you.

ADOLF. Yes, I am indeed to be pitied. And now I'm bankrupt, absolutely — and the worst of it is I haven't got her any more.

GUSTAV [*with a few steps toward the right*]. What good would she be to you? She would be what God above was to me before I became an atheist — a subject on which I could lavish my reverence. You keep your feeling of reverence dark, and let something else grow on top of it — a healthy contempt, for instance.

ADOLF. I can't live without some one to reverence.

GUSTAV. Slave!

[*He goes round the table on the right.*]

ADOLF. And without a woman to reverence, to worship.

GUSTAV. Oh, the deuce! Then you go back to that God of yours — if you really must have something on which you can crucify yourself; but you call yourself an atheist when you've got the superstitious belief in women in your own blood; you call yourself a free thinker when you can't think freely about a lot of silly women. Do you know what all this illusive quality, this sphinx-like mystery, this profundity in your wife's temperament all really comes to? The whole thing is sheer stupidity; why, the woman can't distinguish between A.B. and bull's foot for the life of her. And look here, it's something shoddy in the mechanism, that's where the fault lies. Outside it looks like a fifty-guinea hunting watch, open it and you find it's tuppenny-halfpenny gun-metal. [*He comes up to Adolf.*] Put her in trousers, draw a mustache under her nose with a piece of coal, and then listen to her in the same state of mind, and then you'll be perfectly convinced that it is quite a different kettle of fish altogether — a gramaphone which reproduces, with rather less volume, your words and other people's words. Do you know how a woman is constituted? Yes, of course you do. A boy with the breasts of a mother, an immature man, a precocious child whose growth has been stunted, a chronically anæmic creature that has a regular emission of blood thirteen times in the year. What can you do with a thing like that?

ADOLF. Yes — but — but then how can I believe — that we are really on an equality?

GUSTAV [*moves away from him again towards the right*]. Sheer hallucination! The fascination of the petticoat. But it is so; perhaps, in fact you have become like each other, the leveling has taken place. But I say. [*He takes out his watch.*] We've been chatting for quite long enough. Your wife's bound to be here shortly. Wouldn't it be better to leave off now, so that you can rest for a little?

[*He comes nearer and holds out his hand to say good-by. Adolf grips his hand all the tighter.*]

ADOLF. No, don't leave me. I haven't got the pluck to be alone.

GUSTAV. Only for a little while. Your wife will be coming in a minute.

ADOLF. Yes, yes — she's coming. [*Pause.*] Strange, isn't it? I long for her and yet I'm frightened of her. She caresses me, she is tender, but her kisses have something in them which smothers one, something which sucks, something which stupefies. It is as though I were the child at the circus whose face the clown is making up in the dressing-room, so that it can appear red-cheeked before the public.

GUSTAV [*leaning on the arm of Adolf's chair*]. I'm sorry for you, old man. Although I'm not a doctor I am in a position to tell you that you are a dying man. One only has to look at your last pictures to be quite clear on the point.

ADOLF. What do you say — what do you mean?

GUSTAV. Your coloring is so watery, so consumptive and thin, that the yellow of the canvas shines through. It is just as though your hollow ashen white cheeks were looking out at me.

ADOLF. Ah!

GUSTAV. Yes, and that's not only my view. Haven't you read to-day's paper?

ADOLF [*he starts*]. No.

GUSTAV. It's before you on the table.

ADOLF [*he gropes after the paper without having the courage to take it*]. Is it in here?

GUSTAV. Read it, or shall I read it to you?

ADOLF. No.

GUSTAV [*turns to leave*]. If you prefer it, I'll go.

ADOLF. No, no, no! I don't know how it is — I think I am beginning to hate you, but all the same I can't do without your being near me. You have helped to drag me out of the slough which I was in, and, as luck would have it, I just managed to work my way clear and then you knocked me on the head and plunged me in again. As long as I kept my secrets to myself I still had some guts — now I'm empty. There's a picture by an Italian master that describes a torture scene. The entrails are dragged out of a saint by means of a windlass. The martyr lies there and sees himself getting continually thinner and thinner, but the roll on the windless always gets perpetually fatter, and so it seems to me that you get stronger since you've taken me up and that you're taking away now with you, as you go, my innermost essence, the core of my character, and there's nothing left of me but an empty husk.

GUSTAV. Oh, what fantastic notions; besides, your wife is coming back with your heart.

ADOLF. No; no longer, after you have burnt it for me. You have passed through me, changing everything in your track to ashes — my art, my love, my hope, my faith.

GUSTAV [*comes near to him again*]. Were you so splendidly off before?

ADOLF. No, I wasn't, but the situation might have been saved; now it's too late. Murderer!

GUSTAV. We've wasted a little time. Now we'll do some sowing in the ashes.

ADOLF. I hate you! I curse you!

GUSTAV. A healthy symptom. You've still got some strength, and now I'll screw up your machinery again. I say. [*He goes behind the square table on the left and comes in front of the sofa.*] Will you listen to me and obey me?

ADOLF. Do what you will with me, I'll obey.

GUSTAV. Look at me.

ADOLF [*looks him in the face*]. And now you look at me again with that other expression in those eyes of yours, which draws me to you irresistibly.

GUSTAV. Now listen to me.

ADOLF. Yes, but speak of yourself. Don't speak any more of me: it's as though I were wounded, every movement hurts me.

GUSTAV. Oh no, there isn't much to say about me, don't you know. I'm a private tutor in dead languages and a widower, that's all. [*He goes in front of the table.*] Hold my hand.

[*Adolf does so.*]

ADOLF. What awful strength you must have, it seems as though a fellow were catching hold of an electric battery.

GUSTAV. And just think, I was once quite as weak as you are. [*Sternly.*] Get up.

ADOLF [*gets up*]. I am like a child

without any bones, and my brain is empty.

GUSTAV. Take a walk through the room.

ADOLF. I can't.

GUSTAV. You must; if you don't I'll hit you.

ADOLF [*stands up*]. What do you say?

GUSTAV. I've told you — I'll hit you.

ADOLF [*jumps back to the circular table on the right, beside himself*]. You!

GUSTAV [*follows him*]. Bravo! That's driven the blood to your head, and woken up your self-respect. Now I'll give you an electric shock. Where's your wife?

ADOLF. Where's my wife?

GUSTAV. Yes.

ADOLF. At — a meeting.

GUSTAV. Certain?

ADOLF. Absolutely.

GUSTAV. What kind of a meeting?

ADOLF. An orphan association.

GUSTAV. Did you part friends?

ADOLF [*hesitating*]. Not friends.

GUSTAV. Enemies, then? What did you say to make her angry?

ADOLF. You're terrible. I'm frightened of you. How did you manage to know that?

GUSTAV. I've just got three known quantities, and by their help I work out the unknown. What did you say to her, old chap?

ADOLF. I said — only two words — but two awful words. I regret them — I regret them.

GUSTAV. You shouldn't do that. Well, speak!

ADOLF. I said, "Old coquette."

GUSTAV. And what else?

ADOLF. I didn't say anything else.

GUSTAV. Oh yes, you did; you've only forgotten it. Perhaps because you haven't got the pluck to remember it. You've locked it up in a secret pigeonhole; open it.

ADOLF. I don't remember.

GUSTAV. But I know what it was — the sense was roughly this: "You ought to be ashamed of yourself to be always flirting at your age. You're getting too old to find any more admirers."

ADOLF. Did I say that — possibly? How did you manage to know it?

GUSTAV. On my way here I heard her tell the story on the steamer.

ADOLF. To whom?

GUSTAV [*walks up and down on the left*]. To four boys, whom she happened to be with. She has a craze for pure boys, just like —

ADOLF. A perfectly innocent *penchant*.

GUSTAV. Quite as innocent as playing brother and sister when one is father and mother.

ADOLF. You saw her, then?

GUSTAV. Yes, of course; but you've never seen her if you didn't see her then — I mean, if you weren't present — and that's the reason, don't you know, why a husband can never know his wife. Have you got her photograph?

ADOLF [*takes a photo out of his pocket-book. Inquisitively*]. Here you are.

GUSTAV [*takes it*]. Were you present when it was taken?

ADOLF. No.

GUSTAV. Just look at it? Is it like the portrait you painted? No, the features are the same, but the expression is different. But you don't notice that, because you insist on seeing in it the picture of her which you've painted. Now look at this picture as a painter, without thinking of the original. What does it represent? I can see nothing but a tricked-out flirt, playing the decoy. Observe the cynical twist in the mouth, which you never managed to see. You see that her look is seeking a man quite different from you. Observe the dress is *décolleté*, the coiffure titivated to the last degree, the sleeves finished high up. You see?

ADOLF. Yes, now I see.

GUSTAV. Be careful, my boy.

ADOLF. Of what?

GUSTAV [*gives him back the portrait*]. Of her revenge. Don't forget that by saying she was no longer attractive to men you wounded her in the one thing which she took most seriously. If you'd called her literary works twaddle she'd have laughed, and pitied your bad taste, but now — take it from me — if she hasn't avenged herself already it's not her fault.

ADOLF. I must be clear on that point.

[*He goes over to Gustav, and sits down in his previous place. Gustav approaches him.*]

GUSTAV. Find out yourself.

ADOLF. Find out myself?

GUSTAV. Investigate. I'll help you, if you like.

ADOLF [*after a pause*]. Good. Since I've been condemned to death once — so be it — sooner or later it's all the same what's to happen.

GUSTAV. One question first. Hasn't your wife got just one weak point?

ADOLF. Not that I know of. [*Adolf goes to the open door in the center*]. Yes. You can hear the steamer in the Sound now — she'll be here soon. And I must go down to meet her.

GUSTAV [*holding him back*]. No, stay here. Be rude to her. If she's got a good conscience she'll let you have it so hot and strong that you won't know where you are. But if she feels guilty she'll come and caress you.

ADOLF. Are you so sure of it?

GUSTAV. Not absolutely. At times a hare goes back in the tracks, but I'm not going to let this one escape me. My room is just here. [*Points to the door on the right and goes behind Adolf's chair.*] I'll keep this position, and be on the look-out, while you play your game here, and when you've played it to the end we'll exchange parts. I'll go in the cage and leave myself to the tender mercies of the snake, and you can stand at the keyhole. Afterwards we'll meet in the park and compare notes. But pull yourself together, old man, and if you show weakness I'll knock on the floor twice with a chair.

ADOLF [*getting up*]. Right. But don't go away: I must know that you're in the next room.

GUSTAV. You can trust me for that. But be careful you aren't afraid when you see later on how I can dissect a human soul and lay the entrails here on the table. It may seem a bit uncanny to beginners, but if you've seen it done once you don't regret it. One thing more, don't say a word that you've met me, or that you have made any acquaintance during her absence — not a word. I'll ferret out her weak point myself. Hush! She's whistling — then she's in a temper. Now stick to it. [*He points to the left.*] And sit here on this chair, then she'll have to sit there [*He points to the sofa on the left.*], and I can keep you both in view at the same time.

ADOLF. We've still got an hour before dinner. There are no new visitors, for there has been no bell to announce them. We'll be alone together — more's the pity!

GUSTAV. You seem pretty limp. Are you unwell?

ADOLF. I'm all right; unless, you know, I'm frightened of what's going to happen. But I can't help its happening. The stone rolls, but it was not the last drop of water that made it roll, nor yet the first — everything taken together brought it about.

GUSTAV. Let it roll, then; it won't have any peace until it does. Good-by, for the time being.

[*Exit on the right. Adolf nods to him, stands up for a short time, looking at the photograph, tears it to pieces, and throws the fragments behind the circular table on the right; he then sits down in his previous place, nervously arranges his tie, runs his fingers through his hair, fumbles with the lapels of his coat, etc. Thekla enters on the left.*]

SCENE II.

THEKLA [*frank, cheerful and engaging, goes straight up to her husband and kisses him*]. Good-day, little brother; how have you been getting on?

[*She stands on his left.*]

ADOLF [*half overcome but jocularly resisting*]. What mischief have you been up to, for you to kiss me?

THEKLA. Yes, let me just confess. Something very naughty — I've spent an awful lot of money.

ADOLF. Did you have a good time, then?

THEKLA. Excellent. [*She goes to his right.*] But not at the Congress. It was as dull as ditch-water, don't you know. But how has little brother been passing the time, when his little dove had flown away?

[*She looks around the room, as though looking for somebody or scenting something, and thus comes behind the sofa on the left.*]

ADOLF. Oh, the time seemed awfully long.

THEKLA. Nobody to visit you?

ADOLF. Not a soul.

THEKLA [*looks him up and down and sits down on the sofa*]. Who sat here?

ADOLF. Here? No one.

THEKLA. Strange! The sofa is as warm as anything, and there's the mark of an elbow in the cushion. Have you had a lady visitor?

[*She stands up.*]

ADOLF. Me? You're not serious?

THEKLA [*turns away from the square table and comes to Adolf's right*]. How he blushes! So the little brother wants to mystify me a bit, does he? Well, let him come here and confess what he's got on his conscience to his little wife.

[*She draws him to her. Adolf lets his head sink on her breast; laughing.*]

ADOLF. You're a regular devil, do you know that?

THEKLA. No, I know myself so little.

ADOLF. Do you never think about yourself?

THEKLA [*looking in the air, while she looks at him searchingly*]. About myself? I only think about myself. I am a shocking egoist, but how philosophical you've become, my dear.

ADOLF. Put your hand on my forehead.

THEKLA [*playfully*]. Has he got bees in his bonnet again? Shall I drive them away? [*She kisses him on the forehead.*] There, it's all right now? [*Pause, moving away from him to the right.*] Now let me hear what he's been doing to amuse himself. Painted anything pretty?

ADOLF. No; I've given up painting!

THEKLA. What, you've given up painting!

ADOLF. Yes, but don't scold me about it. How could I help it if I wasn't able to paint any more?

THEKLA. What are you going to take up then?

ADOLF. I'm going to be a sculptor. [*Thekla passes over in front of the square table and in front of the sofa.*] Yes, but don't blame me — just look at this figure.

THEKLA [*unwraps the figure on the table*]. Hallo, I say. Who's this meant to be?

ADOLF. Guess!

THEKLA [*tenderly*]. Is it meant to be his little wife? And he isn't ashamed of it, is he?

ADOLF. Hasn't he hit the mark?

THEKLA. How can I tell? — the face is lacking.

[*She drapes the figure.*]

ADOLF. Quite so — but all the rest? Nice?

THEKLA [*taps him caressingly on the cheek*]. Will he shut up? Otherwise I'll kiss him.

[*She goes behind him; Adolf defending himself.*]

ADOLF. Look out, look out, anybody might come.

THEKLA [*nestling close to him*]. What do I care! I'm surely allowed to kiss my own husband. That's only my legal right.

ADOLF. Quite so; but do you know the people here in the hotel take the view that we're not married because we kiss each other so much, and our occasional quarreling makes them all the more cocksure about it, because lovers usually carry on like that.

THEKLA. But need there be any quarrels? Can't he always be as sweet and good as he is at present. Let him tell me. Wouldn't he like it himself? Wouldn't he like us to be happy?

ADOLF. I should like it, but —

THEKLA [*with a step to the right*]. Who put it into his head not to paint any more?

ADOLF. You're always scenting somebody behind me and my thoughts. You're jealous.

THEKLA. I certainly am. I was always afraid some one might estrange you from me.

ADOLF. You're afraid of that, you say, though you know very well that there isn't a woman living who can supplant you — that I can't live without you.

THEKLA. I wasn't frightened the least bit of females. It was your friends I was afraid of: they put all kinds of ideas into your head.

ADOLF [*probing*]. So you were afraid? What were you afraid of?

THEKLA. Some one has been here. Who was it?

ADOLF. Can't you stand my looking at you?

THEKLA. Not in that way. You aren't accustomed to look at me like that.

ADOLF. How am I looking at you then?

THEKLA. You are spying underneath your eyelids.

ADOLF. Right through. Yes, I want to know what it's like inside.

THEKLA. I don't mind. As you like. I've nothing to hide, but — your very manner of speaking has changed — you employ expressions. [*Probing.*] You philosophize. Eh? [*She goes toward him in a menacing manner.*] Who has been here?

ADOLF. My doctor — nobody else.

THEKLA. Your doctor! What doctor?

ADOLF. The doctor from Strömastad.

THEKLA. What's his name?

ADOLF. Sjöberg.

THEKLA. What did he say?

ADOLF. Well — he said, among other things — that I'm pretty near getting epilepsy.

THEKLA [*with a step to the right*]. Among other things! What else did he say?

ADOLF. Oh, something extremely unpleasant.

THEKLA. Let me hear it.

ADOLF. He forbade us to live together as man and wife for some time.

THEKLA. There you are. I thought as much. They want to separate us. I've already noticed it for some time.

[*She goes round the circular table toward the right.*]

ADOLF. There was nothing for you to notice. There was never the slightest incident of that description.

THEKLA. What do you mean?

ADOLF. How could it have been possible for you to have seen something which wasn't there if your fear hadn't heated your imagination to so violent a pitch that you saw what never existed? As a matter of fact, what were you afraid of? That I might borrow another's eye so as to see you as you really were, not as you appeared to me?

THEKLA. Keep your imagination in check, Adolf. Imagination is the beast in the human soul.

ADOLF. Where did you get this wisdom from? From the pure youths on the steamer, eh?

THEKLA [*without losing her self-possession*]. Certainly — even youth can teach one a great deal.

ADOLF. You seem, for once in a way, to be awfully keen on youth?

THEKLA [*standing by the door in the center*]. I have always been so, and that's how it came about that I loved you. Any objection?

ADOLF. Not at all. But I should very much prefer to be the only one.

THEKLA [*coming forward on his right, and joking as though speaking to a child*]. Let the little brother look here. I've got such a large heart that there is room in it for a great many, not only for him.

ADOLF. But little brother doesn't want to know anything about the other brothers.

THEKLA. Won't he just come here and let himself be teased by his little woman, because he's jealous — no, envious is the right word.

[*Two knocks with a chair are heard from the room on the right.*]

ADOLF. No, I don't want to fool about, I want to speak seriously.

THEKLA [*as though speaking to a child*]. Good Lord! he wants to speak seriously. Upon my word! Has the man become serious for once in his life? [*Comes on his left, takes hold of his head and kisses him.*] Won't he laugh now a little?

[*Adolf laughs.*]

THEKLA. There, there!

ADOLF [*laughs involuntarily*]. You damned witch, you! I really believe you can bewitch people.

THEKLA [*comes in front of the sofa*]. He can see for himself, and that's why he mustn't worry me, otherwise I shall certainly bewitch him.

ADOLF [*springs up*]. Thekla! Sit for me a minute in profile, and I'll do the face for your figure.

THEKLA. With pleasure.

[*She turns her profile toward him.*]

ADOLF [*sits down, fixes her with his eyes and acts as though he were modeling*]. Now, don't think of me, think of somebody else.

THEKLA. I'll think of my last conquest.

ADOLF. The pure youth?

THEKLA. Quite right. He had the duckiest, sweetest little mustache, and cheeks like cherries, so delicate and soft, one could have bitten right into them.

ADOLF [*depressed*]. Just keep that twist in your mouth.

THEKLA. What twist?

ADOLF. That cynical insolent twist which I've never seen before.

THEKLA [*makes a grimace*]. Like that?

ADOLF. Quite. [*He gets up.*] Do you know how Bret Harte describes the adulteress?

THEKLA [*laughs*]. No, I've never read that Bret What-do-you-call-him.

ADOLF. Oh! she's a pale woman who never blushes.

THEKLA. Never? Oh yes, she does; oh yes, she does. Perhaps when she meets her lover, even though her husband and Mr. Bret didn't manage to see anything of it.

ADOLF. Are you so certain about it?

THEKLA [*as before*]. Absolutely. If the man isn't able to drive her very blood to her head, how can he possibly enjoy the pretty spectacle?

[*She passes by him toward the right.*]

ADOLF [*raving*]. Thekla! Thekla!

THEKLA. Little fool!

ADOLF [*sternly*]. Thekla!

THEKLA. Let him call me his own dear little sweetheart, and I'll get red all over before him, shal' I?

ADOLF [*disarmed*]. I'm so angry with you, you monster, that I should like to bite you.

THEKLA [*playing with him*]. Well, come and bite me; come.

[*She holds out her arms towards him.*]

ADOLF [*takes her by the neck and kisses her*]. Yes, my dear, I'll bite you so that you die.

THEKLA [*joking*]. Look out, somebody might come.

[*She goes to the fireplace on the right and leans on the chimney-piece.*]

ADOLF. Oh, what do I care if they do. I don't care about anything in the whole world so long as I have you.

THEKLA. And if you don't have me any more?

ADOLF [*sinks down on the chair on the left in front of the circular table*]. Then I die!

THEKLA. All right, you needn't be frightened of that the least bit; I'm already much too old, you see, for anybody to like me.

ADOLF. You haven't forgotten those words of mine? — I take them back.

THEKLA. Can you explain to me why it is that you're so jealous, and at the same time so sure of yourself?

ADOLF. No, I can't explain it, but it may be that the thought that another man has possessed you, gnaws and consumes me. It seems to me at times as though our whole love were a figment of the brain — a passion that had turned into a formal matter of honor. I know nothing which would be more intolerable for me to bear, than for him to have the satisfaction of making me unhappy. Ah, I've never seen him, but the very thought that there is such a man who watches in secret for my unhappiness, who conjures down on me the curse of heaven day by day, who would laugh and gloat over my fall — the very idea of the thing lies like a nightmare on my breast, drives me to you, holds me spellbound, cripples me.

THEKLA [*goes behind the circular table and comes on Adolf's right*]. Do you think I should like to give him that satisfaction, that I should like to make his prophecy come true?

ADOLF. No, I won't believe that of you.

THEKLA. Then if that's so, why aren't you easy on the subject?

ADOLF. It's your flirtations which keep me in a chronic state of agitation. Why do you go on playing that game?

THEKLA. It's no game. I want to be liked, that's all.

ADOLF. Quite so; but only liked by men.

THEKLA. Of course. Do you suggest it would be possible for one of us women to get herself liked by other women?

ADOLF. I say. [*Pause.*] Haven't you heard recently — from him?

THEKLA. Not for the last six months.

ADOLF. Do you never think of him?

THEKLA [*after a pause, quickly and tonelessly*]. No. [*With a step toward the left.*] Since the death of the child there is no longer any tie between us. [*Pause.*]

ADOLF. And you never see him in the street?

THEKLA. No; he must have buried himself somewhere on the west coast. But why do you harp on that subject just now?

ADOLF. I don't know. When I was so alone these last few days, it just occurred

to me what he must have felt like when he was left stranded.

THEKLA. I believe you've got pangs of conscience.

ADOLF. Yes.

THEKLA. You think you're a thief, don't you?

ADOLF. Pretty near.

THEKLA. All right. You steal women like you steal children or fowl. You regard me to some extent like his real or personal property. Much obliged.

ADOLF. No; I regard you as his wife, and that's more than property: it can't be made up in damages.

THEKLA. Oh yes, it can. If you happen to hear one fine day that he has married again, these whims and fancies of yours will disappear. [*She comes over to him.*] Haven't you made up for him to me?

ADOLF. Have I? — and did you use to love him in those days?

THEKLA [*goes behind him to the fireplace on the right*]. Of course I loved him — certainly.

ADOLF. And afterwards?

THEKLA. I got tired of him.

ADOLF. And just think, if you get tired of me in the same way?

THEKLA. That will never be.

ADOLF. But suppose another man came along with all the qualities that you want in a man? Assume the hypothesis, wouldn't you leave me in that case?

THEKLA. No.

ADOLF. If he riveted you to him so strongly that you couldn't be parted from him, then of course you'd give me up?

THEKLA. No; I have never yet said anything like that.

ADOLF. But you can't love two people at the same time?

THEKLA. Oh yes. Why not?

ADOLF. I can't understand it.

THEKLA. Is anything then impossible simply because you can't understand it? All men are not made on the same lines, you know.

ADOLF [*getting up a few steps to the left*]. I am now beginning to understand.

THEKLA. No, really?

ADOLF [*sits down in his previous place by the square table*]. No, really? [*Pause, during which he appears to be making an effort to remember something, but without success.*] Thekla, do you know that your frankness is beginning to be positively agonizing? [*Thekla moves away from him behind the square table and goes behind the sofa on the left.*] Haven't you told me, times out of number, that frankness is the most beautiful virtue you know, and that I must spend all my time in acquiring it? But it seems to me you take cover behind your frankness.

THEKLA. Those are the new tactics, don't you see.

ADOLF [*after a pause*]. I don't know how it is, but this place begins to feel uncanny. If you don't mind, we'll travel home this very night.

THEKLA. What an idea you've got into your head again. I've just arrived, and I've no wish to travel off again.

[*She sits down on the sofa on the left.*]

ADOLF. But if I want it?

THEKLA. Nonsense! What do I care what you want? Travel alone.

ADOLF [*seriously*]. I now order you to travel with me by the next steamer.

THEKLA. Order? What do you mean by that?

ADOLF. Do you forget that you're my wife?

THEKLA [*getting up*]. Do you forget that you're my husband?

ADOLF [*following her example*]. That's just the difference between one sex and the other.

THEKLA. That's right, speak in that tone — you have never loved me.

[*She goes past him to the right up to the fireplace.*]

ADOLF. Really?

THEKLA. No, for loving means giving.

ADOLF. For a man to love means giving, for a woman to love means taking — and I've given, given, given.

THEKLA. Oh, to be sure, you've given a fine lot, haven't you?

ADOLF. Everything.

THEKLA [*leans on the chimneypiece*]. There has been a great deal besides that. And even if you did give me everything, I accepted it. What do you mean by coming now and handing the bill for your presents? If I did take them, I proved to you by that very fact that I

loved you. [*She approaches him.*] A girl only takes presents from her lover.

ADOLF. From her lover, I agree. There you spoke the truth. [*With a step to the left.*] I was just your lover, but never your husband.

THEKLA. A man ought to be jolly grateful when he's spared the necessity of playing cover, but if you aren't satisfied with the position you can have your *congé*. I don't like a husband.

ADOLF. No, I noticed as much, for when I remarked, some time back, that you wanted to sneak away from me, and get a set of your own, so as to be able to deck yourself out with my feathers, to scintillate with my jewels, I wanted to remind you of your guilt. And then I changed from your point of view into that inconvenient creditor, whom a woman would particularly prefer to keep at a safe distance from one, and then you would have liked to have canceled the debt, and to avoid getting any more into my debt; you ceased to pilfer my coffers and transferred your attention to others. I was your husband without having wished it, and your hate began to arise; but now I'm going to be your husband, whether you want it or not. I can't be your lover any more, that's certain!

[*He sits down in his previous place on the right.*]

THEKLA [*half joking, she moves away behind the table and goes behind the sofa*]. Don't talk such nonsense.

ADOLF. You be careful! It's a dangerous game, to consider every one else an ass and only oneself smart.

THEKLA. Everybody does that more or less.

ADOLF. And I'm just beginning to suspect that that husband of yours wasn't such an ass after all.

THEKLA. Good God! I really believe you're beginning to have sympathy — for him?

ADOLF. Yes, almost.

THEKLA. Well, look here. Wouldn't you like to make his acquaintance, so as to pour out your heart to him if you want to? What a charming picture! But I, too, begin to feel myself drawn to him somehow. I'm tired of being the nurse of a baby like you. [*She goes a few steps forward and passes by Adolf on the right.*] He at any rate was a man, even though he did make the mistake of being my husband.

ADOLF. Hush, hush! But don't talk so loud, we might be heard.

THEKLA. What does it matter, so long as we're taken for man and wife.

ADOLF. So this is what it comes to then? You are now beginning to be keen both on manly men and pure boys.

THEKLA. There are no limits to my keenness, as you see. And my heart is open to the whole world, great and small, beautiful and ugly. I love the whole world.

ADOLF [*standing up*]. Do you know what that means?

THEKLA. No, I don't know, I only feel.

ADOLF. It means that old age has arrived.

THEKLA. Are you starting on that again now? Take care!

ADOLF. You take care!

THEKLA. What of?

ADOLF. Of this knife.

[*Goes towards her.*]

THEKLA [*flippantly*]. Little brother shouldn't play with such dangerous toys.

[*She passes by him behind the sofa.*]

ADOLF. I'm not playing any longer.

THEKLA [*leaning on the arm of the sofa*]. Really, he's serious, is he, quite serious? Then I'll jolly well show you — that you made a mistake. I mean — you'll never see it yourself, you'll never know it. The whole world will be up to it, but you jolly well won't, you'll have suspicions and surmises and you won't enjoy a single hour of peace. You will have the consciousness of being ridiculous and of being deceived, but you'll never have proofs in your hand, because a husband never manages to get them. [*She makes a few steps to the right in front of him and toward him.*] That will teach you to know me.

ADOLF [*sits down in his previous place by the table on the left*]. You hate me.

THEKLA. No, I don't hate you, nor do I think that I could ever get to hate you. Simply because you're a child.

ADOLF. Listen to me! Just think of the time when the storm broke over us. [*Standing up.*] You lay there like a new-born child and shricked; you caught hold of my knees and I had to kiss your eyes to sleep. Then I was your nurse,

and I had to be careful that you didn't go out into the street without doing your hair. I had to send your boots to the shoe-maker. I had to take care there was something in the larder. I had to sit by your side and hold your hand in mine by the hour, for you were frightened, frightened of the whole world, deserted by your friends, crushed by public opinion. I had to cheer you up till my tongue stuck to my palate and my head ached; I had to pose as a strong man, and compel myself to believe in the future, until at length I succeeded in breathing life into you while you lay there like the dead. Then it was I you admired, then it was I who was the man; not the athlete like the man you deserted, but the man of psychic strength, the man of magnetism, who transferred his moral force into your enervated muscles and filled your empty brain with new electricity. And then I put you on your feet again, got a small court for you, whom I jockeyed into admiring you, as a sheer matter of friendship to myself, and I made you mistress over me and my home. I painted you in my finest pictures, in rose and azure on a ground of gold, and there was no exhibition in which you didn't have the place of honor. At one moment you were called St. Cecelia, then you were Mary Stuart, Karm Mansdotter, Ebba Brahe, and so I succeeded in awakening and stimulating your interests and so I compelled the yelping rabble to look at you with my own dazzled eyes. I impressed your personality on them by sheer force. I compelled them until you had won their overwhelming sympathy — so that at last you have the free *entrée*. And when I had created you in this way it was all up with my own strength — I broke down, exhausted by the strain. [*He sits down in his previous place. Thekla turns toward the fireplace on the right.*] I had lifted you up, but at the same time I brought myself down; I fell ill; and my illness began to bore you, just because things were beginning to look a bit rosy for you — and then it seemed to me many times as though some secret desire were driving you to get away from your creditor and accomplice. Your love became that of a superior sister, and through want of a better part I fell into the habit of the new rôle of the little brother. Your tenderness remained the same as ever, in fact it has rather increased, but it is tinged with a grain of pity which is counterbalanced by a strong dose of contempt, and that will increase until it becomes complete, even as my genius is on the wane and your star is in the ascendant. It seems, too, as though your source were likely to dry up, when I leave off feeding it, or, rather, as soon as you show that you don't want to draw your inspiration from me any longer. And so we both go down, but you need somebody you can put in your pocket, somebody new, for you are weak and incapable of carrying any moral burden yourself. So I became the scapegoat to be slaughtered alive, but all the same we had become like twins in the course of years, and when you cut through the thread of my longing, you little thought that you were throttling our own self. You are a branch from my tree, and you wanted to cut yourself free from your parent stem before it had struck roots, but you are unable to flourish on your own, and the tree in its turn couldn't do without its chief branch, and so both perish.

THEKLA. Do you mean, by all that, that you've written my books?

ADOLF. No; you say that so as to provoke me into a lie. I don't express myself so crudely as you, and I've just spoken for five minutes on end simply so as to reproduce all the nuances, all the half-tones, all the transitions, but your barrel organ has only one key.

THEKLA [*walking up and down on the right*]. Yes, yes; but the gist of the whole thing is that you've written my books.

ADOLF. No, there's no gist. You can't resolve a symphony into one key; you can't translate a multifarious life into a single cipher. I never said anything so crass as that I'd written your books.

THEKLA. But you meant it all the same.

ADOLF [*furious*]. I never meant it.

THEKLA. But the result —

ADOLF [*wildly*]. There's no result if one doesn't add. There is a quotient, a long infinitesimal figure of a quotient, but I didn't add.

THEKLA. You didn't, but I can.

ADOLF. I quite believe you, but I never did.

THEKLA. But you wanted to.

ADOLF [*exhausted, shutting his eyes*]. No, no, no — don't speak to me any more, I'm getting convulsions — be quiet, go away! You're flaying my brain with your brutal pinchers — you're thrusting your claws into my thoughts and tearing them.

[*He loses consciousness, stares in front of him and turns his thumbs inwards.*]

THEKLA [*tenderly coming towards him*]. What is it, dear? Are you ill? [*Adolf beats around him. Thekla takes her handkerchief, pours water on to it out of the bottle on the table right of the center door, and cools his forehead with it.*] Adolf!

ADOLF [*he shakes his head*]. Yes.

THEKLA. Do you see now that you were wrong?

ADOLF [*after a pause*]. Yes, yes, yes — I see it.

THEKLA. And you ask me to forgive you?

ADOLF. Yes, yes, yes — I ask you to forgive me; but don't talk right into my brain any more.

THEKLA. Now kiss my hand.

ADOLF. I'll kiss your hand, if only you won't speak to me any more.

THEKLA. And now you'll go out and get some fresh air before dinner.

ADOLF [*getting up*]. Yes, that will do me good, and afterwards we'll pack up and go away.

THEKLA. No.

[*She moves away from him up to the fireplace on the right.*]

ADOLF. Why not? You must have some reason.

THEKLA. The simple reason that I've arranged to be at the reception this evening.

ADOLF. That's it, is it?

THEKLA. That's it right enough. I've promised to be there.

ADOLF. Promised? You probably said that you'd try to come; it doesn't prevent you from explaining that you have given up your intention.

THEKLA. No, I'm not like you: my word is binding on me.

ADOLF. One's word can be binding without one being obliged to respect every casual thing one lets fall in conversation; or did somebody make you promise that you'd go? In that case, you can ask him to release you because your husband is ill.

THEKLA. No, I've no inclination to do so. And, besides, you're not so ill that you can't quite well come along too.

ADOLF. Why must I always come along too? Does it contribute to your greater serenity?

THEKLA. I don't understand what you mean.

ADOLF. That's what you always say when you know I mean something which you don't like.

THEKLA. Re-a-lly? And why shouldn't I like it?

ADOLF. Stop! stop! Don't start all over again — good-by for the present — I'll be back soon; I hope that in the meanwhile you'll have thought better of it.

[*Exit through the central door and then toward the right. Thekla accompanies him to the back of the stage. Gustav enters, after a pause, from the right.*]

SCENE III.

[*Gustav goes straight up to the table on the left and takes up a paper without apparently seeing Thekla.*]

THEKLA [*starts, then controls herself*]. You?

[*She comes forward.*]

GUSTAV. It's me — excuse me.

THEKLA [*on his left*]. Where do you come from?

GUSTAV. I came by the highroad, but — I won't stay on here after seeing that —

THEKLA. Oh, you stay — Well, it's a long time.

GUSTAV. You're right, a very long time.

THEKLA. You've altered a great deal, Gustav.

GUSTAV. But you, on the other hand, my dear Thekla, are still quite as fascinating as ever — almost younger, in fact. Please forgive me. I wouldn't for anything disturb your happiness by my presence. If I'd known that you were staying here I would never have —

THEKLA. Please — please, stay. It may be that you find it painful.

GUSTAV. It's all right as far as I'm concerned. I only thought — that whatever I said I should always have to run the risk of wounding you.

THEKLA [*passes in front of him toward the right*]. Sit down for a moment, Gustav; you don't wound me, because you have the unusual gift — which always distinguished you — of being subtle and tactful.

GUSTAV. You're too kind; but how on earth can one tell if — your husband would regard me in the same light that you do.

THEKLA. Quite the contrary. Why, he's just been expressing himself with the utmost sympathy with regard to you.

GUSTAV. Ah! Yes, everything dies away, even the names which we cut on the tree's bark — not even malice can persist for long in these temperaments of ours.

THEKLA. He's never entertained malice against you — why, he doesn't know you at all — and, so far as I'm concerned, I always entertained the silent hope that I would live to see the time in which you would approach each other as friends — or at least meet each other in my presence, shake hands, and part.

GUSTAV. It was also my secret desire to see the woman whom I loved more than my life in really good hands, and, as a matter of fact, I've only heard the very best account of him, while I know all his work as well. All the same, I felt the need of pressing his hand before I grew old, looking him in the face, and asking him to preserve the treasure which providence had entrusted to him, and at the same time I wanted to extinguish the hate which was burning inside me, quite against my will, and I longed to find peace of soul and resignation, so as to be able to finish in quiet that dismal portion of my life which is still left me.

THEKLA. Your words come straight from your heart; you have understood me, Gustav — thanks.

[*She holds out her hand.*]

GUSTAV. Ah, I'm a petty man. Too insignificant to allow of your thriving in my shadow. Your temperament, with its thirst for freedom, could not be satisfied by my monotonous life, the slavish routine to which I was condemned, the narrow circle in which I had to move. I appreciate that, but you understand well enough — you who are such an expert psychologist — what a struggle it must have cost me to acknowledge that to myself.

THEKLA. How noble, how great to acknowledge one's weaknesses so frankly — it's not all men who can bring themselves to that point. [*She sighs.*]. But you are always an honest character, straight and reliable — which I knew how to respect, — but —

GUSTAV. I wasn't — not then, but suffering purges, care ennobles and — and — I have suffered.

THEKLA [*comes nearer to him*]. Poor Gustav, can you forgive me, can you? Tell me.

GUSTAV. Forgive? What? It is I who have to ask you for forgiveness.

THEKLA [*striking another key*]. I do believe that we're both crying — though we're neither of us chickens.

GUSTAV [*softly sliding into another tone*]. Chickens, indeed! I'm an old man, but you — you're getting younger every day.

THEKLA. Do you mean it?

GUSTAV. And how well you know how to dress!

THEKLA. It was you and no one else who taught me that. Do you still remember finding out my special colors?

GUSTAV. No.

THEKLA. It was quite simple, don't you remember? Come, I still remember distinctly how angry you used to be with me if I ever had anything else except pink.

GUSTAV. I angry with you? I was never angry with you.

THEKLA. Oh yes, you were, when you wanted to teach me how to think. Don't you remember? And I wasn't able to catch on.

GUSTAV. Not able to think, everybody can think, and now you're developing a quite extraordinary power of penetration — at any rate in your writings.

THEKLA [*disagreeably affected, tries to change the subject quickly*]. Yes, Gustav dear, I was really awfully glad to see you again, especially under circumstances so unemotional.

GUSTAV. Well, you can't say at any

rate that I was such a cantankerous cuss: taking it all round, you had a pretty quiet time of it with me.

THEKLA. Yes; if anything too quiet.

GUSTAV. Really? But I thought, don't you see, that you wanted me to be quiet and nothing else. Judging by your expressions of opinion as a bride, I had to come to that assumption.

THEKLA. How could a woman know then what she really wanted? Besides, mother had always drilled into me to make the best of myself.

GUSTAV. Well, and that's why it is that you're going as strong as possible. There's such a lot always doing in artist life — your husband isn't exactly a home-bird.

THEKLA. But even so one can have too much of a good thing.

GUSTAV [*suddenly changing his tone*]. Why, I do believe you're still wearing my earrings.

THEKLA [*embarrassed*]. Yes, why shouldn't I? We're not enemies, you know — and then I thought I would wear them as a symbol that we're not enemies — besides, you know that earrings like this aren't to be had any more.

[*She takes one off.*]

GUSTAV. Well, so far so good; but what does your husband say on the point?

THEKLA. Why should I ask him?

GUSTAV. You don't ask him? But that's rubbing it in a bit too much — it could quite well make him look ridiculous.

THEKLA [*simply — in an undertone*]. If it only weren't so pretty.

[*She has some trouble in adjusting the earring.*]

GUSTAV [*who has noticed it*]. Perhaps you will allow me to help you?

THEKLA. Oh, if you would be so kind.

GUSTAV [*presses it into the ear*]. Little ear! I say, dear, supposing your husband saw us now.

THEKLA. Then there'd be a scene.

GUSTAV. Is he jealous, then?

THEKLA. I should think he is — rather!

[*Noise in the room on the right.*]

GUSTAV [*passes in front of her toward the right*]. Whose room is that?

THEKLA [*stepping a little toward the left*]. I don't know — tell me how you are now, and what you're doing.

[*She goes to the table on the left.*]

GUSTAV. You tell me how you are. [*He goes behind the square table on the left, over to the sofa.—Thekla, embarrassed, takes the cloth off the figure absentmindedly.*] No! who is that? Why — it's you!

THEKLA. I don't think so.

GUSTAV. But it looks like you.

THEKLA [*cynically*]. You think so?

GUSTAV [*sits down on the sofa*]. It reminds one of the anecdote: "How could your Majesty say that?"

THEKLA [*laughs loudly and sits down opposite him on the settee*]. What foolish ideas you do get into your head. Have you got by any chance some new yarns?

GUSTAV. No; but you must know some.

THEKLA. I don't get a chance any more now of hearing anything which is really funny.

GUSTAV. Is he as prudish as all that?

THEKLA. Rather!

GUSTAV. Never different?

THEKLA. He's been so ill lately.

[*Both stand up.*]

GUSTAV. Well, who told little brother to walk into somebody else's wasps' nest.

THEKLA [*laughs*]. Foolish fellow, you!

GUSTAV. Poor child! do you still remember that once, shortly after our engagement, we lived in this very room, eh? But then it was furnished differently, there was a secretary for instance, here, by the pillar, and the bed [*With delicacy.*] was here.

THEKLA. Hush!

GUSTAV. Look at me!

THEKLA. If you would like me to.

[*They keep their eyes looking into each other's for a minute.*]

GUSTAV. Do you think it is possible to forget a thing which has made so deep an impression on one's life?

THEKLA. No; the power of impressions is great, particularly when they are the impressions of one's youth.

[*She turns toward the fireplace on her right.*]

GUSTAV. Do you remember how we met for the first time? You were such an ethereal little thing, a little slate on which your parents and governess had scratched some wretched scrawl, which I had to rub out afterwards, and then I wrote a new text on it, according to what

I thought right, till it seemed to you that the slate was filled with writing. [*He follows her to the circular table on the right.*] That's why, do you see, I shouldn't like to be in your husband's place — no, that's his business. [*Sits down in front of the circular table.*] But that's why meeting you has an especial fascination for me. We hit it off together so perfectly, and when I sit down here and chat with you it's just as though I were uncorking bottles of old wine which I myself have bottled. The wine which is served to me is my own, but it has mellowed. And now that I intend to marry again, I have made a very careful choice of a young girl whom I can train according to my own ideas. [*Getting up.*] For woman is man's child, don't you know; if she isn't his child, then he becomes hers, and that means that the world is turned upside down.

THEKLA. You're going to marry again?

GUSTAV. Yes. I'm going to try my luck once more, but this time I'll jolly well see that the double harness is more reliable and shall know how to guard against any bolting.

THEKLA [*turns and goes over toward him to the left*]. Is she pretty?

GUSTAV. Yes, according to my taste, but perhaps I'm too old, and strangely enough — now that chance brings me near to you again — I'm now beginning to have grave doubts of the feasibility of playing a game like that twice over.

THEKLA. What do you mean?

GUSTAV. I feel that my roots are too firmly embedded in your soil, and the old wounds break open. You're a dangerous woman, Thekla.

THEKLA. Re-a-lly? My young husband is emphatic that is just what I'm not — that I can't make any more conquests.

GUSTAV. That means he's left off loving you.

THEKLA. What he means by love lies outside my line of country.

[*She goes behind the sofa on the left. Gustav goes after her as far as the table on the left.*]

GUSTAV. You've played hide and seek so long with each other that the "he" can't catch the she, nor the she the "he," don't you know. Of course it's just the kind of thing one would expect. You had to play the little innocent, and that makes him quite tame. As a matter of fact a change has its disadvantages — yes, it has its disadvantages.

THEKLA. You reproach me?

GUSTAV. Not for a minute. What always happens, happens with a certain inevitability, and if this particular thing hadn't happened something else would, but this did happen, and here we are.

THEKLA. You're a broad-minded man. I've never yet met anybody with whom I liked so much to have a good straight talk as with you. You have so little patience with all that moralizing and preaching, and you make such small demands on people, that one feels really free in your presence. Do you know I'm jealous of your future wife?

[*She comes forward and passes by him toward the right.*]

GUSTAV. And you know I'm jealous of your husband.

THEKLA. And now we must part! Forever!

[*She goes past him till she approaches the center door.*]

GUSTAV. Quite right, we must part — but before that, we'll say good-by to each other, won't we?

THEKLA [*uneasily*]. No.

GUSTAV [*dogging her*]. Yes, we will; yes, we will. We'll say good-by; we will drown our memories in an ecstasy which will be so violent that when we wake up the past will have vanished from our recollection forever. There are ecstasies like that, you know. [*He puts his arm around her waist.*] You're being dragged down by a sick spirit, who's infecting you with his own consumption. I will breathe new life into you. I will fertilize your genius, so that it will bloom in the autumn like a rose in the spring, I will —

[*Two lady visitors appear on the right behind the central door.*]

SCENE IV.

[*The previous characters; the Two Ladies.*]

[*The ladies appear surprised, point, laugh, and exeunt on the left.*]

SCENE V.

THEKLA [*disengaging herself*]. Who was that?

GUSTAV [*casually, while he closes the central door*]. Oh, some visitors who were passing through.

THEKLA. Go away! I'm afraid of you.

[*She goes behind the sofa on the left.*]

GUSTAV. Why?

THEKLA. You've robbed me of my soul.

GUSTAV [*comes forward*]. And I give you mine in exchange for it. Besides, you haven't got any soul at all. It's only an optical illusion.

THEKLA. You've got a knack of being rude in such a way that one can't be angry with you.

GUSTAV. That's because you know very well that I am designated for the place of honor — tell me now when — and where?

THEKLA [*coming toward him*]. No. I can't hurt him by doing a thing like that. I'm sure he still loves me, and I don't want to wound him a second time.

GUSTAV. He doesn't love you. Do you want to have proofs?

THEKLA. How can you give me them?

GUSTAV [*takes up from the floor the fragments of photograph behind the circular table on the right*]. Here, look at yourself!

[*He gives them to her.*]

THEKLA. Oh, that is shameful!

GUSTAV. There, you can see for yourself — well, when and where?

THEKLA. The false brute!

GUSTAV. When?

THEKLA. He goes away to-night by the eight-o'clock boat.

GUSTAV. Then —

THEKLA. At nine. [*A noise in the room on the right.*] Who's in there making such a noise?

GUSTAV [*goes to the right at the keyhole*]. Let's have a look — the fancy table has been upset and there's a broken water-bottle on the floor, that's all. Perhaps some one has shut a dog up there. [*He goes again toward her.*] Nine o'clock, then?

THEKLA. Right you are. I should only like him to see the fun — such a piece of deceit, and what's more, from a man that's always preaching truthfulness, who's always drilling into me to speak the truth. But stop — how did it all happen? He received me in almost an unfriendly manner — didn't come to the pier to meet me — then he let fall a remark over the pure boy on the steamboat, which I pretended not to understand. But how could he know anything about it? Wait a moment. Then he began to philosophize about women — then you began to haunt his brain — then he spoke about wanting to be a sculptor, because sculpture was the art of the present day — just like you used to thunder in the old days.

GUSTAV. No, really?

[*Thekla moves away from Gustav behind the sofa on the left.*]

THEKLA. "No, really?" Now I understand. [*To Gustav.*] Now at last I see perfectly well what a miserable scoundrel you are. You've been with him and have scratched his heart out of his body. It's you — you who've been sitting here on the sofa. It was you who've been suggesting all these ideas to him: that he was suffering from epilepsy, that he should live a celibate life, that he should pit himself against his wife and try to play her master. How long have you been here?

GUSTAV. Eight days.

THEKLA. You were the man, then, I saw on the steamer?

GUSTAV [*frankly*]. It was I.

THEKLA. And did you really think that I'd fall in with your little game?

GUSTAV [*firmly*]. You've already done it.

THEKLA. Not yet.

GUSTAV [*firmly*]. Yes, you have.

THEKLA [*comes forward*]. You've stalked my lamb like a wolf. You came here with a scoundrelly plan of smashing up my happiness and you've been trying to carry it through until I realize what you were up to and put a spoke in your precious wheel.

GUSTAV [*vigorously*]. That's not quite accurate. The thing took quite another course. That I should have wished in my heart of hearts that things should go badly with you is only natural. Yet I was more or less convinced that it would

not be necessary for me to cut in actively; because, I had far too much other business to have time for intrigues. But just now, when I was loafing about a bit, and happened to run across you on the steamer with your circle of young men, I thought that the time had come to get to slightly closer quarters with you two. I came here and that lamb of yours threw himself immediately into the wolf's arms. I aroused his sympathy by methods of reflex suggestion, into details of which, as a matter of good form, I'd rather not go. At first I experienced a certain pity for him, because he was in the very condition in which I had once found myself. Then, as luck would have it, he began unwittingly to probe about in my old wound — you know what I mean — the book — and the ass — then I was overwhelmed by a desire to pluck him to pieces and to mess up the fragments in such a tangle that they could never be put together again. Thanks to the conscientious way in which you have cleared the ground, I succeeded only too easily, and then I had to deal with you. You were the spring in the works that had to be taken to pieces. And, that done, the game was to listen for the smash-up. When I came into this room I had no idea what I was to say. I had a lot of plans in my head, like a chess player, but the character of the opening depended on the moves you made; one move led to another, chance was kind to me. I soon had you on toast — and now you're in a nice mess.

THEKLA. Nonsense.

GUSTAV. Oh yes; what you'd have prayed your stars to avoid has happened: society, in the persons of two lady visitors — I didn't commandeer their appearance because intrigue is not in my line — society, I say, has seen your pathetic reconciliation with your first husband, and the penitent way in which you crawled back into his faithful arms. Isn't that enough?

THEKLA [*she goes over to him toward the right*]. Tell me — you who make such a point of being so logical and so intellectual — how does it come about that you, who make such a point of your maxim that everything which happens happens as a matter of necessity, and that all our actions are determined —

GUSTAV [*corrects her*]. Determined up to a certain extent.

THEKLA. It comes to the same thing.

GUSTAV. No.

THEKLA. How does it come about that you, who are bound to regard me as an innocent person, inasmuch as nature and circumstances have driven me to act as I did, could regard yourself as justified in revenging yourself on me.

GUSTAV. Well, the same principle applies, you see — that is to say, the principle that my temperament and circumstances drove me to revenge myself. Isn't it a case of six of one and half-a-dozen of the other? But do you know why you've got the worst of it in this struggle? [*Thekla looks contemptuous.*] Why you and that husband of yours managed to get downed? I'll tell you. Because I was stronger than you, and smarter. It was you, my dear, who was a donkey — and he as well! So you see that one isn't necessarily bound to be quite an ass even though one doesn't write any novels or paint any pictures. Just remember that!

[*He turns away from her to the left.*]

THEKLA. Haven't you got a grain of feeling left?

GUSTAV. Not a grain — that's why, don't you know, I'm so good at thinking, as you are perhaps able to see by the slight proofs which I've given you, and can play the practical man equally well, and I've just given you something of a sample of what I can do in that line.

[*He strides round the table and sofa on the left and turns again to her.*]

THEKLA. And all this simply because I wounded your vanity?

GUSTAV [*on her left*]. Not that only, but you be jolly careful in the future of wounding other people's vanity — it's the most sensitive part of a man.

THEKLA. What a vindictive wretch! Ugh!

GUSTAV. What a promiscuous wretch. Ugh!

THEKLA. Do you mean that's my temperament?

GUSTAV. Do you mean that's my temperament?

THEKLA [*goes over toward him to the left*]. You wouldn't like to forgive me?

GUSTAV. Certainly, I have forgiven you.

THEKLA. You?

GUSTAV. Quite. Have I ever raised my hand against you two in all these years? No. But when I happened to be here I favored you two with scarce a look and the cleavage between you is already there. Did I ever reproach you, moralize, lecture? No. I joked a little with your husband and the accumulated dynamite in him just happened to go off, but I, who am defending myself like this, am the one who's really entitled to stand here and complain. Thekla, have you nothing to reproach yourself with?

THEKLA. Not the least bit — the Christians say it's Providence that guides our actions, others call it Fate, aren't we quite guiltless?

GUSTAV. No doubt we are to a certain extent. But an infinitesimal something remains, and that contains the guilt, all the same, and the creditors turn up sooner or later! Men and women may be guiltless, but they have to render an account. Guiltless before Him in whom neither of us believes any more, responsible to themselves and to their fellow-men.

THEKLA. You've come, then, to warn me?

GUSTAV. I've come to demand back what you stole from me, not what you had as a present. You stole my honor, and I could only win back mine by taking yours — wasn't I right?

THEKLA [*after a pause, going over to him on the right*]. Honor! Hm! And are you satisfied now?

GUSTAV [*after a pause*]. I am satisfied now.

[*He presses the bell by the door L. for the Waiter.*]

THEKLA [*after another pause*]. And now you're going to your bride, Gustav?

GUSTAV. I have none — and shall never have one. I am not going home because I have no home, and shall never have one.

[*Waiter comes in on the left.*]

SCENE VI.

[*Previous characters — Waiter standing back.*]

GUSTAV. Bring me the bill — I'm leaving by the twelve-o'clock boat.

[*Waiter bows and exit left.*]

SCENE VII.

THEKLA. Without a reconciliation?

GUSTAV [*on her left*]. Reconciliation? You play about with so many words that they've quite lost their meaning. We reconcile ourselves? Perhaps we are to live in a trinity, are we? The way for you to effect a reconciliation is to put matters straight. You can't do that alone. You have not only taken something, but you have destroyed what you took, and you can never put it back. Would you be satisfied if I were to say to you: "Forgive me because you mangled my heart with your claws; forgive me for the dishonor you brought upon me; forgive me for being seven years on end the laughing-stock of my pupils, forgive me for freeing you from the control of your parents; for releasing you from the tyranny of ignorance and superstition; for making you mistress over my house; for giving you a position and friends, I, the man who made you into a woman out of the child you were? Forgive me like I forgive you? Anyway, I now regard my account with you as squared. You go and settle up your accounts with the other man.

THEKLA. Where is he? What have you done with him? I've just got a suspicion — a — something dreadful!

GUSTAV. Done with him? Do you still love him?

THEKLA [*goes over to him toward the left*]. Yes.

GUSTAV. And a minute ago you loved me? Is that really so?

THEKLA. It is.

GUSTAV. Do you know what you are, then?

THEKLA. You despise me?

GUSTAV. No, I pity you. It's a characteristic — I don't say a defect, but certainly a characteristic — that is very fatal, by reason of its results. Poor Thekla! I don't know — but I almost think that I'm sorry for it, although I'm quite innocent — like you. But anyway it's perhaps all for the best that you've now got to feel what I felt then. Do you know where your husband is?

THEKLA. I think I know now. [*She points to the right.*] He's in your room just here. He has heard everything, seen everything, and you know they say

that he who looks upon his vampire dies.

Scene VIII.

[*Adolf appears on the right, deadly pale, a streak of blood on his left cheek, a fixed expression in his eyes, white foam on his mouth.*]

Gustav [*moves back*]. No, here he is — settle with him now! See if he'll be as generous to you as I was. Good-by.

[*He turns to the left, stops after a few steps, and remains standing.*]

Thekla [*goes toward Adolf with outstretched arms*]. Adolf! [*Adolf sinks down in his chair by the table on the left. Thekla throws herself over him and caresses him.*] Adolf! My darling child, are you alive? Speak! Speak! Forgive your wicked Thekla! Forgive me! Forgive me! Forgive me! Little brother must answer. Does he hear? My God, he doesn't hear me! He's dead! Good God! O my God! Help! Help us!

Gustav. Quite true, she loves him as well — poor creature!

[*Curtain.*]

AUTUMN FIRES

A Comedy

By Gustav Wied

Translated by Benjamin F. Glazer.

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PERSONS

HELMS,
KRAKAU,
HANSEN,
JOHNSTON,
HAMMER,
BUFFE,
BELLING,
} [*Old Men, inmates of an old men's home*].

KNUT [*An eighteen-year-old boy*].

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AUTUMN FIRES

A Comedy in One Act

By Gustav Wied

[*The room of Helms and Krakau in the Old Men's Home. The time is afternoon of a late September day. There is a window at right looking out on the street and another at left overlooking a courtyard. There is a single door back center which opens into a corridor on both sides of which are similar doors in long regular rows and at the end of which is a stairway from the lower floors.*

An imaginary line divides the room into two equal parts. Helms lives on the street side and Krakau on the side nearest the courtyard. In each division there is a bed, chiffonier, a cupboard, a table, a sofa and several chairs. The stove is on Krakau's side, but by way of compensation Helms has an upholstered arm chair with a tall back. A lamp hangs in the exact center of the ceiling.

Though there is a low screen which can be used as partial partition between the two divisions it is now folded and standing against the back wall, and the two tables are placed down center, end to end, so that the place is for all present purposes a single room.

Helms' side is conspicuously ill kept and in disorder; Krakau's side is spick and span. On Helms' table there is a vase filled with flowers and near it a pair of gray woolen socks and a pair of heavy mittens. There is also a photograph of a boy in a polished nickel standing-frame.

Helms, his spectacles on his nose, sits in his great arm chair at the table and reads a newspaper.

Krakau sits next to him working out a problem on a chess board.

There is a short pause after the curtain rises.]

Krakau. There, I've done it again.

Helms [*without looking up from his paper*]. It's easy enough if one cheats.

Krakau. Who cheats?

Helms. Well, year after year you work out the same problem. Anybody can do that.

Krakau [*rearranging the chessmen*]. You can't.

Helms. Just try another problem once, then see how smart you are.

Krakau. I'm quite satisfied with this one. [*Moves a piece.*] Going to have chocolate to-day?

Helms [*contemptuously*]. Chocolate! What for?

Krakau. I thought on account of it being your birthday —

Helms. Chocolate! That's a drink for women. On my birthday I serve wine.

Krakau. Hmmm! Wine, eh? Who's coming?

Helms. Just one floor.

Krakau. Bolling too?

Helms. I suppose Buffe will bring him along.

Krakau. And he won't have a word to say.

Helms. He never has a word to say.

Krakau. No, never.

Helms. Must you rattle those pieces like that?

Krakau. Can I help it if they are heavy? [*Moves them more carefully.*] You are always complaining about noise. You only do it to remind me how well you can hear.

Helms. Your hearing has gotten a good deal worse this year, hasn't it? Hansen says so, too.

Krakau. Hansen! A lot he knows! [*Moves a piece.*] Is there anything about you in the paper?

Helms. Nonsense! What should there be?

Krakau. Your eightieth birthday. They put all kinds of foolishness in the papers these days.

HELMS. Didn't you hear what I said? There is nothing.

KRAKAU. I heard you.

HELMS [*regards him distrustfully over his spectacles*]. Have you been reading this paper while I was out?

KRAKAU [*loftily*]. I always read the paper at night, you know. Newspaper ought to be read by lamplight.

HELMS. Boasting about your eyesight again.

KRAKAU. Yes, I have excellent eyes. [*Knocks solemnly on wood.*]

HELMS. Did you read the "personal notes"?

KRAKAU [*indignantly*]. I told you I haven't touched your old paper.

HELMS. My son-in-law has been appointed postal inspector.

KRAKAU. Postal Inspector! That's not a very high office. I suppose that is why Knut hasn't turned up to-day.

HELMS [*resentfully*]. You haven't congratulated me.

KRAKAU. Because he's a postal inspector? Hump! Congratulations. [*Pushes aside the chessboard and rises.*]

HELMS [*ironically*]. Thanks. Ah, if my daughter had lived, she would be proud.

KRAKAU [*over his shoulder*]. If Mary's gray cat had been a horse she could have gone riding in the park.

HELMS [*regarding him sharply over his glasses*]. Do you know what I have noticed, Krakau? [*Krakau does not answer.*] I have noticed that whenever I mention my son-in-law you get mad.

KRAKAU. So?

HELMS [*querulously*]. Yes you do. I noticed it long ago. I don't see what you've got against him. His son Knut is your godson, too.

KRAKAU. We'll not talk about that, Helms.

HELMS. But I want to talk about it. We have been friends for sixty years, you and me, and —

KRAKAU [*suddenly*]. Why didn't Knut send regards to me in his birthday letter?

HELMS. Ha, you're jealous, that's what you are. After all, it's my birthday, not yours.

KRAKAU. He never forgot to send regards to *you* on *my* birthday.

HELMS [*beating his breast*]. Well, he's my grandson and he's only your godson.

KRAKAU [*incredulously*]. So — e?

HELMS. Well, isn't he your godson?

KRAKAU. Yes.

HELMS. Then why do you say so — e like that?

KRAKAU [*restraining himself*]. We'd better not talk about that. I told you so before.

HELMS. But, damn it, I insist upon talking about it. I want to know what you mean.

KRAKAU. That's all right.

HELMS. It isn't the first time you've made the same stupid remark. . . . Do you mean to insinuate that he isn't my grandson? Is that what you're driving at?

KRAKAU. For the third time, let's drop the subject. [*Down in the courtyard a hand organ begins to play.*] There's the old organ grinder. . . . This is Thursday.

HELMS. You needn't tell me. I can hear for myself.

KRAKAU. It's your turn to give him something.

HELMS. I have no small change. Lay it out for me.

KRAKAU. Remember you owe me for the pack of matches.

HELMS. This will make seventeen.

KRAKAU. [*Wraps a coin in a bit of paper.*] I just want to make sure you've got it right. You always argue about it afterwards.

HELMS. Hmm!

KRAKAU. [*Opens the window, throws out the coin. The music plays more vigorously, then suddenly stops.*] The porter is chasing him away. . . . I suppose it's because Larsen is sick downstairs.

HELMS [*laughs angrily*]. Huh! You were in an awful hurry about throwing that money down, weren't you? Well, I won't pay you for that.

KRAKAU [*hastily closing the window*]. What kind of a way is that?

HELMS. You should have waited until he'd played a few tunes.

KRAKAU. How was I going to know the porter would chase him away?

HELMS. That's your lookout. You should have waited, then you would have seen, I won't pay you back.

KRAKAU. You're a damned old swindler, Helms, and you always were. [*Turns away and pulls out his pipe.*]

HELMS [*sees the pipe*]. I can't bear tobacco smoke to-day; my throat's too bad.

KRAKAU. Let me tell you something; I take no orders from you.

HELMS. I'll complain to the superintendent. Smoke hurts my throat, and you know it.

KRAKAU. Huh! Won't you complain to your postal clerk son-in-law, too?

HELMS. No, but I'll tell Knut when he comes. I don't see why I let you be his godfather anyway. They wanted some one else, but I said: "No, let's ask Krakau; it will please him." I was a fool.

KRAKAU. You asked me because you knew I'd give him a handsome present. Old miser that you are!

HELMS. But you've always been jealous because I am his grandfather while you are only his godfather.

KRAKAU. So — !

HELMS [*furious*]. Don't you dare to smoke, do you hear!

KRAKAU. Who's smoking? [*Puts the pipe back in his pocket.*]

HELMS. You needn't pretend you are not jealous. Why, when my daughter was alive and came to visit me here you used to crawl over to your own side and hide your envious face.

KRAKAU. She didn't come to see me.

HELMS. Well, you might at least have been polite. . . . But you were always a false friend. You never forgave me for having a wife and family while you were a lonely old bachelor.

KRAKAU. So — e!

HELMS. Don't make that nasty noise! It's true; you know it's true. To this day I remember how angry you were when Andrea was born. For two years you didn't set foot in my house. You said you couldn't bear children about. . . . But if she had been your own child —

KRAKAU. Can't you talk about anything else?

HELMS. And you wouldn't come to my wife's funeral either. I shall never forgive you that, Krakau,— the wife of your best friend — and now you want to smoke though you know I have a weak throat.

KRAKAU. Why will you talk like an idiot? Don't you see the pipe is in my pocket.

HELMS. Well, you were going to smoke, weren't you? And there's another thing: It never occurred to you to congratulate me when I told you my son-in-law had been made a postal clerk.

KRAKAU [*ironically*]. I do congratulate you. But you needn't be so stuck up about it. He's not the only postal inspector in the world.

HELMS. Who's stuck up? Not a bit of it! I was thinking of Knut. He'll be better provided for now his father has a good position. Isn't it natural for me to think of Knut's welfare? I am his grandfather.

KRAKAU. So — o?

HELMS. There you go again with your So — o! My daughter's son is my grandson. Any fool knows that.

KRAKAU. Many a fool has believed he was a daughter's father — and wasn't.

HELMS. What's that? My daughter . . . ? You are an idiot.

KRAKAU. Do you remember what happened to Adam Harbee?

HELMS. That has nothing to do with the case. My wife was not that sort of a woman. You'll concede that.

KRAKAU. Ye-es.

HELMS. Well, then — but what can an innocent old bachelor like you know of such things.

KRAKAU. Are you going to talk stuck up again, Helms?

HELMS. Sure I will: I am too stuck up to let an ignorant bachelor like you teach me what's what about married life. What do you know about it? Virgin!

KRAKAU [*infuriated*]. I'll tell you what I know about it. You are not Andrea's father at all.

HELMS [*laughs incredulously*]. Ain't I? Well, if I may take the liberty to ask, who is her father?

KRAKAU. That's all right. We'll not talk about it any more.

HELMS. Oh yes, we will! Who is her father, if I am not?

KRAKAU. That's all right.

HELMS. Just empty talk, eh? I might have known it. You just say such things because I owe you seventeen pfennig.

KRAKAU. Twenty-seven! I laid out ten for cake last Friday.

HELMS. Twenty-seven, then. And that's why you make up these stories to annoy me.

KRAKAU. Have it your way.

HELMS [*whimpering*]. Why don't you speak out, then? If I am not Andrea's father, who is? You can't leave it like this. Who is the man you accuse, eh? Was it Axel?

KRAKAU [*scornfully*]. No.

HELMS. Or Summensen?

KRAKAU. Do you suppose Caroline would mix up with a couple of swine like that?

HELMS. Of course I don't. It's you that's been putting such things in my head. You don't know what you are talking about.

KRAKAU. I know what I know.

HELMS [*pounds on the table*]. Who was he then? Speak up or admit that you are a filthy liar.

KRAKAU [*with sudden determination*]. I was her father. Now you know it.

HELMS [*derisively*]. You! . . . Ha, ha, ha! . . . You! God knows how you hit on that idea. Do tell us about it.

KRAKAU [*savagely; he is on his own side of the room now*]. Yes, I'll tell you about it. . . . With pleasure, my dear Helms! . . . I had made up my mind to carry the secret with me to the grave . . . but I can't stand your overbearing ways any more. . . . Now it comes out. . . . And thank God for it. . . . You were a devil to your wife and you have been a devil to me, Helms, all the fifteen years we have lived in this room.

HELMS. Ha, ha! So I've been a devil, eh? The things one lives and learns!

KRAKAU. Yes, a devil — a devil on wheels. You whine and crow and fuss and scold . . . nothing suits you . . . no matter how hard I try . . . and you are mean and niggardly. . . . Every pfennig must be pulled out of you like a tooth.

HELMS. I don't throw my money in the street.

KRAKAU. Nobody throws his money in the street, but you can't get along without spending money, can you?

HELMS. No.

KRAKAU. No, but you expected Caroline to. Instead of money you gave her compliments. Naturally she came to me for help. She had to have pin money and clothes.

HELMS. And you gave her money.

KRAKAU. Of course I did.

HELMS. Yes, what then?

KRAKAU. Of course it was humiliating to her. She was very unhappy. I did my best to console her.

HELMS. And then Andrea was born.

KRAKAU. Yes.

HELMS [*bitterly*]. That was . . . that was powerful consolation, Krakau, I must say. . . . But tell me how you are so sure that Andrea was your daughter.

KRAKAU. Caroline told me herself. Besides, didn't I know that she had lived with you ten years before and never had a child.

HELMS [*pathetically*]. No. [*With a flash of anger.*] Why didn't you tell me this before?

KRAKAU [*who is half sorry now*]. Why should I have told you?

HELMS [*without heeding him; mumbles half to himself, shaking his head*]. And if she was your daughter, then Knut is your grandson and you are also his godfather . . . and to me he is nothing [*bows his head*]. I am eighty years old to-day, Krakau. . . . It is hard to be told such a thing when you are eighty. . . .

KRAKAU [*has gone over to him, sympathetically touching his shoulder*]. I'm sorry, Helms. I wish I hadn't told you. But you made me so angry it just popped out. . . . But don't worry . . . everything will be just the same as before —

HELMS [*shakes his head mournfully*]. No.

KRAKAU. But yes! I don't want him all for myself. We can share him, can't we?

HELMS. Share him?

KRAKAU. Of course. Instead of being your grandson Knut will be *our* grandson, that's all.

HELMS [*sits up proudly*]. Knut is nothing to me.

KRAKAU. But nobody knows that.

HELMS. He is a perfect stranger.

KRAKAU. But nobody knows it except you and me — don't you see?

HELMS. You would throw it up to me every day.

KRAKAU. Never! We should be equal partners. And oh, the long talks we could have about him! . . . Before it was different . . . you were so stuck up about your grandson, I couldn't bear it any longer. . . . But now we can both be stuck up.

HELMS [*hotly*]. No. . . . Go over on

your own side. I don't want you here. . . . I want to be alone.

KRAKAU. Helms . . .

HELMS. Get out of here, I say. . . . And take your flowers with you I accept no presents from the like of you.

KRAKAU. The flowers —?

HELMS. Yes, take them away. And take [*chokes over the word*] take Knut's picture, too, and the stockings his father sent. . . . I guess they're yours by right.

KRAKAU [*indignantly*]. I'll do nothing of the kind. My name's not Carl Helms.

HELMS. Well, take the flowers then.

KRAKAU [*takes the flowers*]. I can do that, all right.

HELMS. And see that you don't come on my side again without asking permission.

KRAKAU [*walks a few paces; turns around*]. Hadn't I better straighten up a bit before your guests come?

HELMS. You leave my things alone . . . and mind your business.

[*Krakau goes with the flowers to his own side.*]

HELMS. You've got the best of everything anyhow. The stove is on your side and the morning sun. Wouldn't you like to take my arm chair too, and my pictures? Don't mind me, you know.

[*Krakau does not answer. There is a pause. A clock outside strikes five.*]

KRAKAU. The clock's striking five.

HELMS. Let it strike.

[*There is another pause. A knock on the door is heard. Neither answers it. There is a louder knock.*]

KRAKAU. [*Impatiently.*] Why don't you answer the door?

HELMS. I'm not in the humor for company.

KRAKAU. But some one is knocking.

HELMS. What's that to me? [*There is a third knock.*]

KRAKAU. Obstinate old fool. [*Loudly.*] Come in.

[*Hansen and Johnston enter. Behind them in the hallway Buffe can be seen with Bolling on his arm. Farther back Hammer is seen.*

[*Krakau rises, goes to the window and stands there, looking gloomily out into the courtyard.*]

HANSEN [*leaving the door open*]. The others are coming. Well, congratulations, Helms.

HELMS. Thank you.

JOHNSTON. Many happy returns. [*They shake hands.*]

BUFFE [*entering with Bolling*]. I'll have to put him in your arm chair.

HELMS. Right over there.

BUFFE. [*Helping Bolling to the chair.*] Our heartiest congratulations, eh, Bolling?

BOLLING. Hey?

BUFFE [*speaking close to his ear*]. I say we congratulate Helms on his birthday.

BOLLING. No. It's nothing to boast about.

HAMMER [*entering*]. Congratulations!

HANSEN. Now we're all here.

HELMS. Make yourselves comfortable. [*They all take seats.*]

[*Bolling sits rigid in the arm chair absently twirling his fingers.*

Kraukau, who has once or twice shown the impulse to go over to Helms, stirs uneasily but turns his back to his window.

A silence falls.

Suddenly Hansen begins to whistle, a tuneless mournful strain.]

JOHNSTON [*whispering confidentially*]. My dear Peter, one doesn't whistle at a birthday party.

HANSEN [*mocking him*]. My dear Henry, mind your own affairs.

JOHNSTON. You have the soul of a greengrocer.

HANSEN. You have the manners of a barber.

BUFFE [*laughing*]. Those boys are always fighting.

HAMMER. But they can't live without each other.

BUFFE [*to Hammer*]. Aren't you lonely since Kruger died?

HAMMER. It is lonesome sometimes, but I have more room now.

BUFFE. My wrists are so full of rheumatism I can hardly bend them any more.

HAMMER. There's something the matter with all of us. How is your throat, Helms?

HELMS. Pretty good. [*There is silence again.*]

HANSEN. Fine weather to-day.

JOHNSTON. Regular birthday weather.

HAMMER. On my birthday it always rains.

HANSEN [*points to the window*]. You can see the sun from here.

BUFFE. I read in the papers about your son-in-law's appointment.

HELMS [*shortly*]. Yes?

JOHNSTON. Yes, we must congratulate you over again.

HANSEN. Helms is the luckiest man in the place.

HAMMER. Has your grandson been here yet?

HELMS. No.

BUFFE. Of course he's coming.

HELMS. I don't know.

JOHNSTON. Of course he'll come on your birthday. He's a fine young fellow.

HANSEN. Yes, indeed, Helms, you should be proud of him.

HAMMER [*sees Knut's portrait*]. There he is. [*All except Helms and Bolling look at the picture.*]

HANSEN. Looks something like his grandfather.

JOHNSTON. Yes, it's a striking resemblance.

HAMMER. The nose.

JOHNSTON. And the eyes — look at the eyes.

HANSEN. Yes.

BUFFE. We are looking at his grandson's picture, Bolling.

[*Bolling stares indifferently. Helms casts apprehensive glances at Krakau.*]

HAMMER. Look at the gifts.

HANSEN. He's a lucky man.

JOHNSTON [*with a sigh*]. Ah yes, when you have your family —

BUFFE [*showing the stockings*]. Helms got some wonderful birthday presents, Bolling.

BOLLING [*feeling them*]. Good wool.

HANSEN [*suddenly*]. What is Krakau doing over there?

HELMS [*angrily*]. Yes, why don't you stop skulking over there like a homeless dog.

BUFFE [*to Hammer*]. They have quarreled.

HAMMER. I guess so. [*To Hansen.*] Have they had a fight?

HANSEN. I don't know.

JOHNSTON. That's right, be sociable, Krakau.

HELMS [*irritably*]. Why don't you get the wine, Krakau?

KRAKAU. How should I know —

HELMS [*interrupts*]. You know it is in the closet. [*Krakau takes bottle and glasses from the cupboard.*]

HAMMER [*delighted*]. Did you say wine?

BUFFE. Wine! Did you hear?

HANSEN. You might think Helms was a postal inspector himself.

JOHNSTON. More than that! He's a millionaire in disguise. Krakau can tell you — he has stockings full of good red gold.

[*Krakau pours the wine. All watch with eager eyes. The sun now shines full in the room.*]

KRAKAU. Hadn't we better push the tables together.

HELMS [*petulantly*]. No. It's *my* birthday. And we can do very well without your table.

HAMMER. There'd be more room with both tables.

BUFFE. We can't all sit around one table.

HELMS. All right — push them together. [*They do so.*]

JOHNSTON. We must fix our tables this way, too, Peter.

HANSEN. All right.

BUFFE [*to Bolling*]. Come over to the table; we are going to have wine.

[*Bolling stands up. They move his chair to the table. He sits again.*]

HANSEN. Why are you so quiet, Bolling?

BOLLING. Everything there is to say has been said.

JOHNSTON. He's a smart man. [*Nods admiringly.*]

HANSEN. Ha, ha, ha!

BOLLING [*suddenly to Krakau*]. What's that you are pouring?

KRAKAU. Sherry.

BOLLING [*angrily*]. I can't stand port wine.

KRAKAU. Yes, but this is sherry.

BOLLING. Port wine is poison.

HAMMER. But this is sherry.

BOLLING. Port wine is poison.

BUFFE. Yes, Bolling; but this is sherry; it won't hurt you.

BOLLING. Poison — port wine is.

JOHNSTON [*raising his glass.*] Many happy returns!

HAMMER. Many future birthdays!

HANSEN. Happy ones!

BUFFE. Bolling, we are drinking to Helms.

BOLLING. It isn't port wine, is it?

BUFFE. No, indeed,— sherry.

BOLLING. I da'sn't drink port..

BUFFE. It's a toast to Helms.

BOLLING. Why?

BUFFE. He's eighty years old to-day.

BOLLING. I am ninety-two. That's nothing to be glad about.

[*All except Bolling raise their glasses. They utter cheery exclamations and drink.*]

HELMS. Thanks; thank you!

BOLLING [*raising his glass*]. Congratulations, Helms. I hope you never get as old as me.

HAMMER [*angrily*]. That's no way to talk, Bolling.

HANSEN. He's spoiling the whole party.

BUFFE [*apologetically*]. Bolling's tired of living.

JOHNSTON. You're joking.

BUFFE. No; really he is. He wants to die.

JOHNSTON. Nonsense! How can any one *want* to die? It's against human nature.

KRAKAU [*who has taken cigars from the cupboard*]. Who wants to smoke?

HANSEN [*with delight.*] Cigars too!

[*Krakau passes the cigars. Hansen, Hammer and Johnston each take one. The sun now shines on the table and men.*]

BUFFE. The sun is as red as wine.

HANSEN [*with a sigh*]. Autumn is coming.

HANSEN. We've had Autumn weather for two weeks past.

HELMS. Unseasonable weather! I hate it. [*During the entire scene he has been ill at ease, casting frequent apprehensive glances at Krakau, who avoids his gaze.*]

BUFFE. It isn't like it used to be.

HAMMER. No. When the calendar said *Summer* we *had* Summer.

BOLLING [*apropos of nothing*]. I am ninety-two.

BUFFE [*explaining apologetically*]. He always says that. It's on his mind.

KRAKAU. I hear that the nurse downstairs is engaged to be married.

HANSEN. Yes, with the doctor.

JOHNSTON. The hospital doctor?

KRAKAU. Yes; he's a sick man himself.

HAMMER. Then it's a good thing she's a nurse.

HELMS. Every young woman ought to be trained as a nurse.

BUFFE [*to Bolling*]. The nurse in the hospital is going to marry the doctor.

BOLLING. I was married, too.

HELMS. Fill the glasses, Krakau. [*Krakau does.*]

BUFFE. How is Larsen's brain fever getting along?

HANSEN. He must be worse. The porter chased the organ grinder away.

HAMMER. I thought I heard the organ. Is this Thursday?

KRAKAU. Thursday, September twentieth.

HELMS [*testily*]. Don't show off, Krakau.

JOHNSTON [*raises his glass*]. Here's health. Splendid sherry.

KRAKAU [*to Buffe*]. Why aren't you drinking?

BUFFE. Thanks. I never take more than one glass. This sunshine warms you as much as wine.

HAMMER. I have the morning sun in my window.

HANSEN. So have I. It wakes me up every morning. It's supposed to be healthy.

HELMS. Krakau stole it from me.

KRAKAU. You know very well that —

HELMS. Yes you did. And the stove, too.

KRAKAU. The stove —

HELMS. Isn't the morning sun on your side?

KRAKAU. Yes, but —

HELMS. And the stove, too?

KRAKAU. Didn't you —

HELMS. Nothing of the kind. You live on the east side, and the morning sun is healthiest.

KRAKAU. We can change, for my part.

HELMS. Do you hear that? Now he wants to steal my view of the street, too?

HAMMER. What do you old friends want to quarrel for?

JOHNSTON. And on your birthday.

HELMS. Who is quarreling?

BUFFE. You may be well satisfied with the afternoon sun, Helms. See how

beautifully it shines in the window. Look at the sun, Bolling.

BOLLING. I've seen it before.

BUFFE [*explaining with pride*]. Bolling used to be a carpenter, you know. He traveled all over the world.

BOLLING. I have seen everything.

[*There is a rap at the door. Silence. Krakau opens it, Knut enters.*]

KNUT [*to Krakau*]. Hello, Grandpop! [*To Helms, shaking his hand.*] Congratulations, grandfather. [*To the others.*] Hello, everybody.

[*The old men nod their heads, delighted. Buffe whispers to Bolling.*]

BUFFE. It's Knut. The son of Helms' daughter.

BOLLING. I had a son.

HELMS. I'm glad you came my — my son [*glares at Krakau defiantly.*]

KNUT. I can only stay a minute. Have you heard about father's appointment?

JOHNSTON. He's been bragging to us about it, sonny.

HAMMER. And treated us to sherry.

BOLLING. Port wine is poison.

HANSEN. And cigars.

KNUT. Not really!

HELMS. Why don't you hang up your cap?

KNUT. I must be off in a minute. Back to school. I had only an hour's leave, and it takes half an hour to ride each way.

BUFFE. How old are you, my boy?

KNUT. Seventeen.

BUFFE. It's sixty-one years since I was that young. He's only seventeen, Bolling.

BOLLING. I was seventeen — once. Now I'm ninety-two.

HAMMER. I am seventy-three.

KNUT. Let's add up the number of years in this room.

HELMS. There's too many. It can't be done.

KNUT [*with a laugh*]. Let's try. [*Rapidly.*] Mr. Bolling is 92 and grandfather is 80; that's 172.

HELMS. There's quick counting for you!

KNUT. How old are you, Mr. Buffe?

BUFFE. Seventy-eight.

KNUT. That's 250.

HAMMER [*in wonderment*]. Two hundred and fifty!

KNUT. And you, grandpop?

KRAKAU. Seventy.

KNUT. 320. And you, Mr. Hammer?

HAMMER. Seventy-three.

KNUT. 393.

JOHNSTON. Think of that!

KNUT. And Mr. Hansen?

[*All the old people except Bolling and Hansen. snigger. Hansen turns away, offended.*]

KNUT. Don't you know how old you are, sir?

HANSEN. Of course, I know.

HELMS. He's ashamed to tell you. Ha, ha!

BUFFE. He's afraid. Ha, ha!

HANSEN. Who's afraid? [*Reluctantly.*] I'm only sixty.

THE OLD PEOPLE. "Only a boy." "Not dry behind the ears." "He'll grow." "Poor child."

KNUT. That makes 453.

JOHNSTON [*beats his chest*]. I am seventy-five.

KNUT. That gives us 528 altogether.

HAMMER. Five hundred and twenty-eight! What a head the boy has on him.

BUFFE [*to Bolling*]. All together we are 528 years old.

BOLLING. What does it matter?

HELMS. We'd be older still if there weren't a boy among us.

JOHNSTON. Yes, Hansen spoils it by being so young.

KRAKAU. You'll have to hurry, Hansen.

HAMMER. Yes, so you will.

BUFFE. Why don't you take something to make you grow?

HANSEN. Oh, let me alone!

KNUT. Well, I must be going.

THE OLD PEOPLE. "What a pity." "Can't you be late for once?" "The teacher won't mind."

KNUT. I really must. Good-by, grandfather. . . . Hope you live eighty years more. . . . Good-by, grandpop. . . . Good-by, everybody. Good luck! [*He exits.*]

HAMMER. You can see him go from here. [*Goes to the window.*]

HANSEN. Can you? [*Joins him.*]

[*All go to the window except Bolling, who sits stiff and abstracted in his chair.*]

HELMS. Open it. [*He helps Johnston do so.*]

JOHNSTON. There he goes.

KRAKAU. He is waving to us. [*All wave back.*]

BUFFE. What a fine lad!

KRAKAU. Good-by. [*All shout good-by. Bolling does not stir.*]

BUFFE [*turning away from the window, with a sigh*]. He's gone.

HANSEN [*low*]. Yes, he's gone.

JOHNSTON. It's nice to have young people around once in a while.

BUFFE [*nods sadly*]. Yes.

JOHNSON. You have a fine young grandson, Helms.

HELMS [*with an uneasy glance at Krakau*]. Yes, I can't complain of him.

BUFFE. It's good to have a family that look after you.

HANSEN. It's good to have a family at all. Many people haven't.

HAMMER. No.

BOLLING. No. They die.

HELMS [*sharply*]. Close the window, Krakau. There's a draught. [*Krakau closes the window.*]

HAMMER. Yes, the sun is down.

BUFFE. Yes.

HANSEN. Isn't it time we were going?

JOHNSTON. These *young* people should be early to bed. [*Laughter.*]

BUFFE. It really is time to go. Thank you, Helms. It was a nice party.

HELMS. Going already? [*Glances uneasily at Krakau.*]

BUFFE. It's near supper time, you know. We are going, Bolling.

HAMMER. Then we'll go too. . . . We enjoyed your party, Helms.

HELMS. The pleasure was mine.

JOHNSTON. Good night, Helms. Next time it's my party.

HELMS. When?

JOHNSTON. October 23rd.

HANSEN. Good-by — and many thanks.

HELMS. Not at all, not at all.

BUFFE. Are you ready, Bolling?

BOLLING. Hum! [*He rises.*]

BUFFE. Good-by, everybody. [*To Bolling.*] Say good-by.

BOLLING. Good-by.

[*Krakau holds open the door. The guests file out talking gayly. He closes the door and their voices are faintly heard outside.*]

[*Helms bustles about uneasily.*]

KRAKAU [*on his own side*]. Well, it went off very nicely.

HELMS. Yes, very well — very well.

KRAKAU. Want me to help you straighten up?

HELMS. No — I can do it myself.

[*There is a pause. Krakau takes back his chairs.*]

KRAKAU. We'll want to move my table back.

HELMS [*seizing one end of it*]. Well, come on! Where are you?

KRAKAU [*taking the other end hastily*]. Coming, coming!

[*The table moved, there is another pause. Each is on his own side. Helms potters helplessly with the bottles and glasses.*]

KRAKAU. Need any help?

HELMS. You stand there doing nothing and you ask me — [*The rest is a sullen growl.*]

[*Krakau takes the glasses, puts them on a tray and carries them across to left.*]

HELMS. Where are you going with my glasses?

KRAKAU [*stops*]. I was going to wash them.

HELMS. Well, don't forget whom they belong to.

KRAKAU. Don't worry. [*Puts the glasses on the wash stand.*] Shall I light the lamp?

HELMS. You can't see in the dark, can you?

KRAKAU [*lighting the hanging lamp*]. Knut behaved very nicely, didn't he?

HELMS [*moodily*]. Yes.

KRAKAU. He made everybody happy with his high spirits.

HELMS. Not me.

KRAKAU [*hastily changing the subject*]. It's funny about old Bolling. How he's changed in the last year! He never talks any more.

HELMS. When you get to be ninety-two and not a relation in the world — [*His voice breaks in self-pity.*]

KRAKAU [*finished with the lamp, makes a little solicitous gesture behind his friend's back, but immediately busies himself with putting things to right*]. Where do you want these things to go?

HELMS. On the chiffonier . . . next to the other . . . Bolling is so old he feels superfluous . . . I am getting like that —

KRAKAU [*hastily*]. Where do these stockings and things go?

HELMS. Next to the last drawer.

KRAKAU. I guess you are all fixed now. . . . There's nothing else? [*Turns from the chiffonier, having closed the drawer, and starts for his own side of the room.*]

HELMS [*suddenly*]. It's a terrible thing you've done to me, Krakau!

KRAKAU [*in surprise*]. What now?

HELMS [*his voice trembling*]. You have made my dead wife a strumpet and my dead daughter a bastard. [*Krakau bridles and turns to him with clenched fists. Helms continues pitifully.*] And you have robbed me in my old age of a grandson . . . all I have in the world. [*Querulously musing.*] When men are young they see red and kill for that sort of thing . . . yes . . . they kill. . . But when you are old it's different. . . . I can't even be very angry with you, Krakau. . . . Isn't it queer? . . . It's all so far back . . . in the past . . . impersonal . . . and blurred like a half-remembered dream.

KRAKAU [*with contrition*]. I shouldn't have told you.

HELMS. You shouldn't have told me. . . . No . . . but you did . . . and I can't be angry with you. . . I am an old fool. . . . After all . . . honor . . . fidelity . . . marriage vows . . . what do they matter when there is nothing to do but to sit and count the days until you die?

KRAKAU [*chokingly*]. Helms!

HELMS [*with a flash of anger*]. But Knut matters. He *is* my grandson . . . in spite of you. . . . You shan't take him away from me.

KRAKAU. I don't want to take him away from you.

HELMS. Your blood . . . perhaps . . . but *my grandson* —

KRAKAU [*eagerly*]. Of course, he is, Helms. We can share him between us. Don't you see? He need never know. No one need know . . . just you and I. . . . We can have him together . . . our own little secret.

HELMS [*looks at him*]. Nobody else will know?

KRAKAU [*solemnly*]. Not a soul. I swear it.

HELMS. Nobody?

KRAKAU. Nobody.

HELMS [*a faint smile dispels his frown*]. And when we talk about Knut you won't say "So-o" any more?

KRAKAU. Never . . . for hereafter he'll be *our* Knut . . . just as if you were his father and I his mother.

HELMS [*the idea pleases him, considers it, then gives his assent like a child playing a game*]. No, I'll be the mother. And we can quarrel about him . . . of course, in a friendly way.

KRAKAU. Always friendly.

HELMS. And just think — we shall have something to talk about all the time.

KRAKAU. Especially at night . . . after supper . . . under the lamp.

HELMS. And when we are in bed in the dark and cannot sleep.

KRAKAU. Always about our Knut.

HELMS. Ha, ha . . . Do you know, Krakau, I think you should have told me long ago.

KRAKAU. I was afraid.

HELMS. Afraid! Absurd. What was there to be afraid about? You can see for yourself that we are better friends since you told me. [*Goes to the chiffonier and gets the photograph.*] He does look something like you.

KRAKAU [*magnanimously*]. Oh, no! He's your wife's son all over.

HELMS [*with equal magnanimity*]. He looks a good deal like you just the same. . . . Don't you want to borrow this for a few days?

KRAKAU. Why, you only got it this morning.

HELMS. Never mind. Take it. . . . Saturday I'll get it back from you. Then in a few days I'll lend it to you again.

KRAKAU. Thanks. [*Takes the photograph*]. Can I borrow the paper, too?

HELMS. Sure, take it with you. . . . And lend me your chess men, will you?

KRAKAU [*with animation*]. I'll get it for you. [*Goes to his own chiffonier for it.*]

HELMS. We might as well move the tables together. It's more comfortable that way.

KRAKAU. Certainly. [*Comes down with the chessboard and helps move the tables.*]

HELMS. Now you take my arm chair and read your paper. I'll play over here.

KRAKAU. I wouldn't think of taking your chair.

HELMS. You do as you are told. [*Sits on an ordinary chair.*] I can reach better from one of these anyway.

KRAKAU. Oh, well. [*Sits in the arm chair and unfolds the newspaper. There is a pause.*]

HELMS. Why don't you light your pipe?

KRAKAU. Your throat —

HELMS. My throat is all right. Go on and smoke.

KRAKAU [*comfortably lights his pipe, relaxes*]. Well, now we'll see how good you are at working out problems.

HELMS. I don't think I can do it.

KRAKAU [*reading*]. Sure you can.

HELMS. Look here. Would you check with the bishop?

KRAKAU [*studies the board*]. No . . . that loses you the queen. . . . Hum . . . you've sort of mixed it up. . . . Back with that rook.

HELM. How's that?

KRAKAU. Brilliant!

HELMS. Knut is back at school by this time.

KRAKAU. Yes, probably studying his lessons.

HELMS. He's a boy.

KRAKAU. None better.

HELMS. Isn't it nice to talk about him like this . . . calm and friendly? . . . You have no cause to be jealous any more, ha, ha!

KRAKAU. And you needn't be stuck up any more, ha, ha!

HELMS. No, ha, ha! There, I've muddled it again.

KRAKAU. No, you haven't. . . . Just move here . . . and here.

HELMS [*suddenly takes out his purse*]. By the way, I owe you twenty-seven pfennig.

KRAKAU. There's no hurry.

HELMS. Take it!

KRAKAU. All right. [*He rises.*]

HELMS. Where are you going?

KRAKAU [*at the chiffonier*]. We forgot the flowers.

HELMS. Oh, yes!

KRAKAU. They smell so fragrant. [*Puts them on the table.*]

HELMS [*takes a flower and puts it in Krakau's buttonhole*]. You must wear one.

KRAKAU [*overcome*]. Thank you, Helms, thank you. [*They bend over the chessboard again.*]

HELMS [*rubs his hands with delight*]. Now white moves.

KRAKAU [*considering*]. White moves. . . . I should say . . . there . . . that pawn . . . I'd sacrifice it.

HELMS [*picks it up with playful tenderness*]. Poor little white pawn! [*Places it on the board.*]

[*They study the next move absorbedly as the curtain falls.*]

[*Curtain.*]

BROTHERS

A Sardonic Comedy

By Lewis Beach

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CHARACTERS

SETH.
LON.
PA.

BROTHERS was first presented by the Provincetown Players, New York. Applications for permission to produce BROTHERS should be addressed to Frank Shay, Four Christopher Street, New York City. No performance may take place without his consent.

BROTHERS

A Sardonic Comedy

By Lewis Beach

[Scene: *A very small room in a tar-papered shanty, reeking poverty. The entrance is center-back,—a few boards nailed together for a door. A similar door, opening into the bedroom of the shack, upstage right. Downstage left, a broken window. Left center, a rusty cooking stove. Above it, a series of shelves holding a few dishes and cooking utensils. Rough board table in the center of the room. A kitchen chair at the right of the table. A large wooden rocker near the stove; rope and wire hold it together. An arm-chair, below the bedroom door is full of newspapers. Several heterogeneous colored prints culled from out-of-date newspapers and calendars are tacked on the rain-stained walls. When the entrance door is open we see a cleared, sandy spot with a background of scrub oaks and jack pines.*

The curtain rises on the late afternoon of a spring day.

A man of forty enters, leaving the bedroom door open behind him. His small head and childish face, on a tall, thin, and extremely erect body, resemble those of a species of putty-like rubber doll whose head may be reshaped by the hand. He wears a winter cap, blue flannel shirt, well-worn trousers with suspenders, and sneakers that were once white. Outside shirt sleeves are rolled to the elbow; undershirt sleeves are not. His shoes make no noise; nevertheless, he comes on tip-toe, his eyes fixed on the shelves. For a moment he stops and glances into the room he has just quitted. Satisfied, he squats before the shelves. He hesitates, then quickly lifts from a lower shelf an inverted cooking vessel, and grasps a small tin box which was hidden under it. He inspects the box, trying to decide whether he can pry open its lock.]

[*The voice of an old, infirm man in the adjoining room*]: Seth?

Seth [*alarmed; starts to return the box to the shelf*]. Yes, Pa? [*His voice is pitched high.*]

Pa [*querulously*]. What yuh doin'?

Seth. Jest settin'.

Pa. Don't yuh go near my tin box 'til I'm dead.

[*Seth makes no answer.*]

Pa. D'yuh hear?

Seth. I hear.

Pa. I won't heve no one know nothin' 'bout my last will an' testament 'til I'm dead.

[*There is a pause. Seth is regarding the box intently.*]

Pa. Seth?

Seth [*peevishly*]. What d'yuh want?

Pa. Bring me a drink.

Seth. There ain't no more water in the pail.

Pa. There's lots in the well this spring.

[*A pause. Seth continues his scrutiny of the lock.*]

Pa. My throat's burnin' up.

Seth. Well, maybe I kin find a drop. [*Puts the box on the shelf and re-covers it; in doing so makes a slight noise.*]

Pa. What's that noise?

Seth. I'm gettin' yuh a drink!

[*Seth strolls to the stove, lifts the top from the kettle, and looks inside. He finds a tin cup and fills it with water. Looking into the kettle again, he sees there is little water left. Why make a trip to the pump necessary? Back into the kettle goes some of the water. Cup in hand, he moves toward the bedroom. He reaches the door when a sagging bellied man enters from the yard. It is Lon, the elder, shorter brother. His face has become molded into an expressionless stare, and his every movement seems to be made with an effort. An abused man, Lon,*

the most ill-treated fellow in the world. At least, so he is ever at pains to have all understand. He wears an old felt hat, cotton shirt, badly patched trousers, suspenders attached to the buttons of his trousers with string, and shoes that are almost soleless. His shirt, stained with sweat, is opened at the throat, revealing red flannel underwear. When Seth sees Lon he immediately closes the bedroom door, silently turns the key in the lock, and puts the key in his pocket. For a moment the men stand looking at each other, reminding one of two roosters. Then Seth strolls to the stove, pours the water into the kettle, and planks himself down in the rocker. Lon glances once or twice at the bedroom door, but moves not to it. He watches Seth suspiciously. Finally he speaks.]

LON [*in an expressionless drawl*]. I hear Pa's dyin'.

SETH. Yuh hear right.

LON [*with a motion of his head toward the bedroom*]. Is he in there?

SETH. Yes.

[*Lon hesitates, then moves slowly toward Pa's room. An idea strikes Seth suddenly and he interrupts Lon's progress.*]

SETH. He's asleep.

[*Lon stops. Seth fills his pipe and lights it. Lon takes his corncob from his pocket and coughs meaningly. Seth looks at Lon, sees what he wants, but does not offer him tobacco. Lon puts his pipe back in his pocket, moves to the table, sits, and sighs. He crosses his right foot so Seth sees what was once the sole of his shoe.*]

SETH. What did yuh come here fur?

LON. 'Cause Pa's dyin'.

SETH. Yuh never come when he was about.

LON. Wall, no one ever seed yuh a settin' here much.

SETH [*fleeringly*]. Suppose yuh want t' know what he's left yuh.

LON. Wall, . . . it warn't comfortable comin' three miles an' a quarter on a day like this un.

SETH [*cackles*]. Sand's hot on yer bare naked feet, ain't it?

LON [*moves his feet*]. Yuh kin talk about my holey boots. If I didn't heve no mouths but my own t' feed I guess I could buy new ones too. So there, Seth Polland!

SETH. Jacobs offered yuh a job at the fisheries same as me.

LON. It's too fur t' hoof it twict a day.

SETH. Yuh could sleep at the fisheries.

LON. I got t' look after my kids.

SETH [*grins*]. 'Tain't my fault yuh've kids.

LON [*threateningly*]. Don't yuh talk 'bout that! [*Pause.*] Yer woman had t' leave yuh. [*Laughs.*] Yuh didn't give her 'nough t' eat.

SETH [*indifferently*]. She warn't no good.

LON. She had t' leave yuh same as Ma left Pa twenty years ago. Pa's dyin' fur sure?

SETH. Who told yuh?

LON. Ma.

SETH [*greatly surprised*]. Ma? [*suspiciously*] What you got t' do with her?

LON. I was passin' her place this mornin'. Furst time I spoke t' her in a year.

SETH. I ain't in two.

LON [*in despair*]. Seth, she's cut twenty cords o' wood t' sell.

SETH [*shaking his head*]. An' me without a roof o' my own.

LON. Me an' the kids wonder sometimes where our next meal's comin' from.

SETH [*as though there were something better in store for him*]. Oh, wall.

LON [*pricks up his ears; coughs*]. If I had this house I could work at the fisheries.

SETH. But yuh ain't a goin' t' git it.

LON [*alarmed*]. Pa ain't gone an' left it t' yuh?

SETH. Pa deeded this t' Doc last winter.

LON [*amazed and angered*]. He did?

SETH. Doc said he could live here 'till he died. But it's Doc's.

LON. It warn't right.

SETH. Wall, he had t' pay fur his physics some way. He told me yuh wouldn't help him out.

LON. And Pa told me yuh wouldn't. An' yuh ain't got two kids t' feed. [*Pause.*] There's Pa's old shanty down

the road. If I had that I could work at the fisheries.

[*Seth's smile is his only response.*]

Pa still owns it, don't he?

SETH. There warn't no call fur him t' make his last will an' testament if he don't.

LON [*brightens*]. He's left his last will an' testament?

SETH. Yes. I'm figgerin' on sellin' the place t' Doc.

LON [*emphatically*]. Pa ain't a left it t' yuh!

SETH. Doc'll want it.

LON [*forcefully*]. Where's the will an' testament?

SETH [*with a gesture*]. In the tin box under that there kittle.

[*Lon hurries to the shelves, picks up the dish, and grasps the box.*]

LON [*disappointed*]. It's locked.

SETH. An' the key's round Pa's neck.

LON. Let's git it.

SETH. Pa won't give it t' us.

LON. Yuh said he was sleepin'.

SETH. I mean — he might wake up.

[*Lon inspects the box further.*]

LON. I think I could open it.

SETH. Pa might ask t' see it.

LON. Hell. [*Puts the box back on the shelf.*]

SETH. Doc'll want the place seein' as how it's right next t' this un.

[*Lon is very nervous.*]

Yuh might jest as wall go home.

LON. No, yuh don't! Yuh can't make me believe Pa's left it t' yuh. [*Takes off his hat and mops his brow with his sleeve. The top of his head is very bald.*]

SETH. Then what yuh gettin' so excited 'bout?

LON. I ain't excited. [*Puts his hat on.*] It jest makes me mad 'cause yuh say Pa's left it t' yuh, an' I know he ain't. See? There warn't no call fur him t' heve willed an' testamented it t' yuh. Yuh've only yerself t' look after an' I've two motherless kids.

SETH. Every one knows how much Pa thought o' them.

LON. It warn't my fault if they thumbed their noses at him.

SETH. Yuh could o' basted 'em.

LON. They's like their Ma. Bastin' never done her no good, God rest her soul. All the same, Pa knowd how hard it is fur me t' keep their bellies full. Why, when we heve bread Alexander never wants less than half the loaf! An' all the work I gits t' do is what the city folks who come t' the Beach in the summer gives me.

SETH. Huh! Jest as though I didn't know 'bout yuh. Mr. Breckenridge told me yuh wouldn't even contract t' chop his wood fur him. An' there yuh sits all winter long in that God-fursaken shanty o' yourn, with trees all round yuh, an' yuh won't put an ax t' one 'til yer own fires dies out.

LON. My back ain't never been strong. Choppin' puts the kinks in it. Yuh kin talk, yuh kin, Seth Polland, with a soft job at the fisheries an' three squares a day which yuh don't heve t' cook yourself. Nothin' t' do all winter but walk round them cottages an' see that no one broke in. An' I'm the one who knows how often yuh walk round them cottages. I wish I hed yer snap. [*Sits.*] But I ain't never had no luck.

SETH [*defending himself*]. I walk round them cottages jest as often as I need t' walk round them cottages.

LON. Huh! I could tell a tale. Who was it set with his feet in the oven last winter, an' let Jack Tompkins break into them cottages — *with keys?* [*Seth does not answer.*] I could tell, I could. But I ain't a goin' t' 'til they put me on the witness-stand. [*Pause.*] But the furst initials o' his name is Seth Polland.

SETH [*rising instantly*]. Lon Polland, yuh ever tell an' I'll skin yuh alive.

LON. Huh!

SETH. Skin yuh like a pole-cat.

LON. Huh!

[*Seth turns, knocks the ashes from his pipe into the stove. Lon rises; takes Seth's chair and rocks vigorously.*]

SETH. Yuh know what I got on yuh.

[*Lon's bravado is short-lived. He rocks less strenuously*]

SETH. Yuh thought I didn't see yuh, but I was right on the spot when yuh set fire t' Mr. Rogers' bath-house.

[*Lon stops rocking.*]

SETH. Right behind a jack pine I was an' seed yuh do it. An' yuh done it 'cause Mr. Rogers leaved Jessup paint the house when yuh thought yuh ought t' had the job.

LON [*rises*]. I got t' be a gettin' home a fore dark an' tend t' my stock.

SETH. Stock? [*Cackles. Pulls out his tobacco-pouch and fills his pipe. Lon shows his pipe again.*] A blind mare an' a rooster. [*Drops pouch on the table as he lights his pipe.*]

LON. Rooster's dead. [*Moves stealthily toward the table.*]

SETH. What of?

LON. Pip.

SETH. Starvation.

LON. I would a killed him this long time, but Victoria howled so when I threatened. The fowl used t' wake me in winter same as summer with his crowin'.

[*As Lon finishes his speech he reaches for the pouch. But Seth's hand is quicker. Seth moves to the rocker and sits, dangling the pouch temptingly by one finger. Lon puts his pipe in his pocket.*]

SETH. Should think yuh'd want t' set round 'til Pa dies, bein' as yer so sure he's left yuh his property.

LON. He oughter a left it t' me.

SETH. Well, I'm a tellin' yuh it's mine.

LON. Yuh ain't got no right t' it. [*Mops his head again.*] Pa begged yuh t' come an' live with him, offered yuh this fine roof over yer head, an' yuh was too cussed even t' do that fur him. An' now yuh expect he's made yuh his heir.

SETH. I've treated him righter 'an yuh.

LON. Yuh ain't.

[*Suddenly something seems to snap in Seth's brain. He looks as though he were in intense pain.*]

SETH [*gasping*]. Maybe he's left it t' the two o' us!

LON. *What?*

SETH. Maybe he's divided the place a 'tween us.

LON [*shakes his head*]. Oh, he wouldn't be so unhuman as that.

SETH. He would. He was always settin' one agin' t' other.

LON. He used t' tell me I had t' figger how t' git the best o' yuh or he'd baste me.

SETH. He was all the time whettin' us on when we was kids.

LON. It was him showed me how t' shake my old clock so it'd run fur five minutes, an' then you'd swop that pail yuh found fur it.

SETH. Huh! He give me his gum t' stop up the hole in that pail. Yuh wouldn't know it leaked an' we could laugh at yuh when you had t' carry water in it.

LON [*pathetically*]. There warn't never more 'an a pint left when I got t' the house. An' Pa always hed such a thirst.

SETH. He'd like t' laugh at us in his grave.

LON. It jest tickled him t' raise hell a 'tween us.

SETH [*rises*]. I'll take my oath he's divided the old shanty an' the two acres a 'tween us. [*Drops into his chair like a condemned man.*] An' I figgered I'd be sellin' them t' Doc t'morrow.

LON. Me an' the kids was a goin' t' heve a garden on the cleared spot.

SETH. A garden in that sand?

LON. Radishes an' rutabagas.

SETH [*persuasively; his manner becomes kind*]. Lon, what yuh need is the shanty.

LON [*droning*]. The shanty ain't no good t' me without I hes the ground fur it t' set on.

SETH. Yuh can tear it down an' use the lumber t' mend yer old leaky one.

LON. I want the shanty t' live in so I kin git a soft job at the fisheries. [*Sympathetically.*] You ought t' have a shanty, Seth. Supposin' yuh was t' take sick. They wouldn't keep yuh at the fisheries then. Yuh take my place an' give me Pa's.

SETH [*flashing into anger*]. I want the two acres t' sell Doc. Yer old place leaks like a net! [*Then, fearing he has been too disparaging:*] But yuh could make it real comfortable with the lumber in —

LON [*cutting in*]. I'll make a bargain. I'll leave yuh a bed-stead an' a table if yuh'll take my place.

SETH. I don't want it! I want Pa's old place.

LON. An' I want it. I'm older 'an yuh.

SETH. I got the best claim t' it.

LON. Yuh ain't. We with three mouths t' feed. Yer a swindler, yuh are. Yuh always tried t' cheat me.

SETH. No one kin say that t' me. I'm an honest man. But I'm a goin' 't heve the two acres if I heve t' go t' law.

LON. Wall, yuh ain't a goin' t' wreck me.

SETH [*calmly; philosophically again*]. Maybe yer right, Lon, when yuh say I ought t' have a roof. I'll tell yuh what I'll do, seein' as how yer my brother. Yuh give me the ground an' the house on it, an' I'll make yuh a present o' twenty-five dollars.

LON. That's a lie! Yuh ain't got twenty-five dollars t' yer name.

SETH. Yuh think so.

LON. Every one in these parts knows yuh owes Hawkins forty-three dollars an twenty-nine cents he kin't collect. Give me the house an' ground, an' I'll give yuh my own house an' my note fur twenty-five dollars.

SETH. Yer note! I'm a goin' t' heve Pa's old place.

LON. An' I say that yuh or no swindler like yuh is a goin' t' cheat me out o' it.

SETH. I ain't a swindler, yuh wall-eyed son —

LON [*advancing*]. Take it back. Don't yuh call me dissipated names.

SETH. I'll never take it back!

[*Lon doubles his fists and strikes; but the blow lands in the air as Seth grabs Lon. They fight furiously and in dead earnest, though there is no ethics to the struggle. The rickety furniture trembles as they advance and retreat. Seth is quicker and lighter and less easily winded; but Lon's bulk is not readily moved, and, despite his "weak back," he can still wield his arms. It looks like a fight to the finish. Isn't their future at stake? And they are giving vent to a hatred bred by their father. But suddenly Pa's voice is heard, calling wildly to Seth. The men do not move: the voice seems to have paralyzed their muscles. For a moment they stand dazed. Then consciousness comes to them: they realize that the waiting is over. They tear to the bedroom. A silence follows. They must be fascinated by the ghost of the old man.*]

SETH [*in the bedroom; quietly*]. He's gone, Lon.

LON [*in the bedroom*]. Yer right, Seth.

[*Then their voices rise in dispute.*]

Don't yuh take it!

SETH. I've got it!

LON. It's mine!

SETH. It ain't!

LON. Yuh kin't—

SETH. Shut up!

[*They rush into the kitchen, Seth in advance, Lon close on his heels. The younger throws the cooking-dish to the floor, grabs the box, and hurries to the table. As though they were about to discover a world's secret, they unlock the box, each as near to it as possible, his arms tense, fingers itching, ready to ward off a blow or seize the treasure. From the box, Seth takes an old tobacco-pouch, a jack-knife, a bit of heavy cord, a couple of letters. These are contemptuously thrown on the table. The will lies at the bottom of the box. Lon snatches it. Seth would take it from him.*]

LON. Hold off! I'm jest a goin' t' read it.

[*Seth curbs his impatience. Lon opens the document and reads, slowly and haltingly.*]

"I, Nathaniel Polland, o' Sandy Point in the County o' Rhodes an' State o' Michigan, bein' o' sound mind an' memory, do make, publish, an' declare this t' be my last Will an' Testament in manner followin', viz —." What does "viz "mean?

[*Unable to bear the suspense longer, Seth seizes the paper. He scans it until his eyes catch the all-important paragraph.*]

SETH. "—Bequeath all my earthly possessions to my wife, Jennie Polland."

[*Their thunderbolt has descended. They stand like two men suddenly deprived of thought and motion. Medusa's victims could not have been more pitiable. They have been hurled from their El Dorado, which, at the worst, was to have been their common property.*

Then Seth's voice comes to him, and sufficient strength to drop into a chair.]

SETH. The damned old critter.

LON. I'll be swaned.

SETH [*blazing out*]. That's gratitude.

LON. After all we done fur him.

SETH [*pathetically*]. An' me a plannin' these last five years on gettin' that house an' ground.

LON. My kids are packin' our furniture this afternoon, gettin' ready t' move in.

SETH [*with supreme disgust*]. Leavin' it t' Ma.

LON. Her who he ain't hardly spoke t' in twenty years.

SETH. Jest as though yuh an' me wasn't alive.

LON. We'd a given him our last pipeful.

SETH. His own flesh an' blood.

LON. Why, he told me more 'an a thousand times he hated Ma.

SETH. She don't need it.

LON. She's ready fur the grave-yard

SETH. She's that stingy, cuttin' an' choppin' wood, sellin it t' the city folks. We might a knowd.

LON. An' me a comin' all the three miles an' a quarter t' see him a fore he died.

SETH. I been settin' here two days a waitin'.

LON. An' then t' treat us like that. [*Wipes his mouth.*] Why, the hull place ain't worth a damn!

SETH. A cavin'-in shanty an' two acres yuh couldn't grow weeds on.

LON. A pile o' sand.

SETH [*rising; bursting into fire like an apparently dead rocket*]. She ain't a goin' t' heve it!

LON. What?

SETH. I won't let Ma heve it!

LON. But how yuh goin' t' stop her? 'Twon't do no good t' tear up the will an' testament. It's rec-ord-ed.

SETH. Don't make no difference. She ain't a goin' t' heve that place.

LON [*eagerly*]. But how yuh goin'—?

SETH. I don't know. But I'm a goin' t'.

LON. It ain't hers by rights.

SETH. Didn't she leave him twenty years ago?

LON. Why, she ain't even expectin' it!

SETH. She'll never miss it if she don't git it.

LON [*shaking his head*]. Me an' the kids packed up, ready t' move in.

[*There is a silence. Lon deep in his disappointment, Seth making his brain work as it has never worked before. And he is rewarded for his diligence. A suggestion of his sneering smile comes to his face.*]

SETH. Lon?

LON. Yes?

SETH [*looks about, making sure that only his brother is listening*]. Yuh 'member what yuh done t' Rogers when he didn't leave yuh paint his bath-house?

LON [*his eyes open wide*]. Burn it?

SETH. Sh!

LON. Oh, no!

SETH. Yuh don't want Ma t' heve it, does yuh?

LON. When I burned that bath-house I didn't sleep good fur a couple o' nights. I dreamed o' the sheriff.

SETH. Nobody knows but me. An' nobody'll know yuh an' me set fire t' Pa's old place.

LON. Yuh swear yuh won't never tell?

SETH [*raising his right hand*]. I swear.

LON. Yuh won't never try an' make out I done it next time we run agin each other fur district school-inspector?

SETH [*raising his right hand*]. I swear. 'Cause if I kin't have Pa's old place, no one kin.

LON. Got matches?

SETH. Yes. An' Pa's kerosene-can's got 'bout a pint in it. [*Takes the can from the bottom shelf.*]

LON. I may as wall take these papers along with me. [*Picks up the newspapers.*]

[*Seth moves to the table. Begins to fill his pipe. Lon takes his corncob from his pocket and coughs. Seth looks at Lon, meditates, then speaks.*]

SETH. Heve a smoke, Lon?

LON. Maybe I will.

[*Lon fills his pipe.—Seth strikes a match, lights his own pipe first, then hands the match to Lon.*]

SETH. We're brothers.

LON. The same flesh an' blood has got t' treat each other right.

[*Lon starts to put Seth's tobacco-pouch in his pocket, but Seth stops him.*]

SETH. An' we wouldn't be treatin' each other right if we let Pa's property come into Ma's hands.

[*Seth carries the kerosene, Lon the papers. They go out the back door and disappear. Thus, in disgust and rage, the brothers are united. Then Seth's voice is heard.*]

SETH [*in the yard*]. Wait a minute, Lon.

[*Seth returns. He picks up Pa's tobacco-pouch, knife and scissors, glances toward the door to see that Lon isn't watching, and sticks them into his pocket.*]

LON [*in the yard*]. What yuh doin', Seth? [*Appears at the door.*]

SETH. I thought I left somethin' valuable. But I ain't. [*He leaves.*]

[*Lon and Seth pass out of sight.*]

[*Curtain.*]

IN THE MORGUE

A Play

By Sada Cowan

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IN THE MORGUE

A Play

By Sada Cowan

[Place: *In the morgue of a foreign city.*]

[Scene: *A small almost empty room with the rear wall of glass. Before this glass black curtains are drawn. An old man . . . Caren . . . sits at a low table, well forward, sorting and arranging papers, writing from time to time. A lamp upon the table, is so shaded as to concentrate the light and throws Caren's wicked face into sharp relief. The room conveys a feeling of unfriendliness, coldness and gloom. Caren is old, so old he is somewhat decrepit . . . hard, shrill and tottering. His features are sharp, his fingers are as talons. He seems almost as a vulture . . . perhaps for hovering too long among the unbeloved dead.*]

Caren [*calling to some one behind the black curtain*]. What was the number of that last one?

Helper [*putting out his head*]. Thirteen. [*He disappears.*]

Caren [*writes and repeats*]. Thirteen. . . .

Voices [*are heard, rough and harsh, from in back of the curtains*]. Shove that stiff up! He's got more room than what's coming to him.

Caren [*calling, without rising*]. Who is it you're moving?

Voice. Thirteen. Any reason why he should sprawl?

Caren. Not a bit. Shove him along.

[*The curtains part. There is a swift vision of brilliant light within, and bodies laid out upon tables of ice.*]

Kraig [*a man, scarcely more than a boy, over-wrought and hysterical, with his hands pressed close to his throbbing temples, bursts out*]. Oh . . . Oh! Let me stay here just a moment away from that horror.

Caren [*glancing up from his writing and smiles*]. You're all the same the first day.

Kraig. Oh . . . Oh!

Caren. That last one got you . . . eh?

Kraig [*bitterly*]. So young . . . so young!

Caren. Must have been a good looker. Much as you can tell the way his face is banged up. I'll bet his own mother wouldn't know him.

Kraig [*turning aside*]. Don't!

Caren [*titters*]. He . . . he . . . he! Number thirteen . . .! I hope he ain't superstitious.

Kraig. He has nothing more to fear.

Caren [*with dread*]. There's no tellin'.

Kraig. He's dead. . . . [*Enviously.*] . . . Dead!

Caren [*angry*]. Fool!

Kraig [*watching through the glass at the placid figure, enviously*]. Dead!

Caren [*exasperated*]. Bah!

Kraig [*suddenly has a hideous thought and turns swiftly to Caren*]. You think it was fair . . .? He went of his own free will?

Caren. Eh . . .? What put that into your head?

Kraig. No clothes . . . naked!

Caren. A lot of them do that when they take the plunge. It ain't so easy to identify them. It saves a lot of bother, too. We stick 'em on the slabs a while and then . . .

Kraig [*shuddering*]. Don't! It makes me cold . . . cold! [*Again he parts the curtains and looks through the glass.*] He's so calm . . . so still. I wonder if he suffered first! [*With a clutch of hatred in his voice.*] I wonder if — he starved!

Caren. That soft white kitten? Not much. Did you get a squint at his hands? He's never even tied his own tie.

Kraig [*laughs*]. And he's here!

Caren [*looking at Kraig*]. This is a funny job for a kid like you to pick.

KRAIG [*turning away*]. I'm not as young as I look. I've got three little ones already. [*With deep anguish.*] And another on the way.

CAREN. It's a queer hang out for a kid like you, just the same.

KRAIG [*hysterically, almost beside himself*]. I tell you . . . there's another on the way

CAREN. What do you mean by that?

KRAIG. Nothing! [*A pause, then bitterly.*] Oh there's one joy down here. You can burrow and hide like a rat from it all. The damn carriages don't roll by before your eyes. The women don't! . . . Oh, those women, how I hate them. Their silks, their jewels, their soft white skins. Fed! Clothed! Housed! . . . [*Clenching his fists.*] While Martha starves! Oh, God! They drive by laughing and I could choke them! Listen what happened. [*He comes closer to Caren and speaks fanatically.*] Yesterday in the park I stood there . . . shivering . . . wondering! And all at once the mad hate came into my heart and I felt that I could kill. [*Caren looks alarmed.*] And then . . . Ha . . . ha . . . ha! Then. . . . The King. . . . The King drove by. [*Laughing bitterly, and with a great flourish.*] And off came my hat! [*Making fun of himself.*] My hat came off my head, Old Man, and I bowed and cringed [*vehemently*] WITH THE HATE IN MY HEART. I could have torn the warm furs from his throat and wrapped my fingers in their place [*his hands clench spasmodically*]. Ugh!

CAREN [*thoroughly alarmed*]. Hush. . . . Hush! You mustn't talk so of our King. A nice young boy he is.

KRAIG. Oh the hate . . . the hate. Perhaps it will leave me here in this hall of the dead. [*Glancing about.*] It all seems so level here. So level.

CAREN [*with the first faint touch of sympathy*]. You're right. Here's the one spot on earth where you get fair play. That's what I like. There ain't no rich and there ain't no poor. And there ain't no class nor nothing. Every man gets a square deal here . . . a square deal.

KRAIG. Perhaps that's worth dying for — a square deal.

CAREN. Dying . . . bah! Wait until you've seen a few more of them slung on the slabs. You'll lose your longing for death. I'm an old man, but . . .

KRAIG. If only I can see more of it. If only I can bear it.

CAREN. The pay's not bad?

KRAIG. It would be bad at any price.

CAREN [*shaking his finger childishly*]. Tut . . . tut! We're fair here . . . fair. There ain't no flowers . . . he . . . he . . . he . . . and there ain't no song [*he chuckles*], but . . .

KRAIG [*with intense passion, pacing to and fro, and never pausing, while he speaks very rapidly*]. If only the living could have what is spent on the dead. All the waste . . . the hateful waste. Flowers wilting in dead hands. Stones weighing down dead hearts. While living bodies famish and living eyes burn for the sight of beauty. Oh, I wonder the dead don't scream out at our madness. I wonder the graves don't burst with the pain of it all.

CAREN. Have they shut me up with a maniac? Have you gone stark out of your mind?

[*There is a loud knocking on the door, to the right.*]

CAREN [*opens it a crack and peeps out cautiously*]. What do you want?

VOICE. Let me in.

CAREN. Get away.

VOICE [*piteously, clamoring*]. Let me look once . . . just once.

CAREN [*harshly*]. Got a pass?

VOICE. No . . . no. Oh, let me in.

CAREN [*bangs the door shut*]. Get away.

VOICE [*brokenly*]. Let me look once . . . just once. [*Caren opens the door a crack.*] Are there any . . . women?

CAREN. Women? Of course, there's women . . . always women. What is it you've craving? The sight of the beauties or the smell of their stinking flesh? Go on . . . get out. This isn't a bawdy house. [*He slams the door to and walks away.*]

KRAIG. What is it he wants?

CAREN. A peep at the stiffs. Probably looking for his girl. [*He passes out of sight, behind the black curtain.*]

KRAIG. Oh! [*Cautiously he peeps after Caren, then opens the door a crack and calls in a whisper*]. Man! . . . You

can see the new ones through the panel there. Lift up the curtain. There's two. A blond haired girl and a boy. [*He turns swiftly as the curtains part and Caren reënters. Softly he shuts the door, then stands watching into the hallway through a glass partition.*] Poor soul!

CAREN [*mumbles as he returns*]. There's something queer about that last young stiff.

KRAIG. Number thirteen?

CAREN. Yes, number thirteen. You may have been right after all. Perhaps it wasn't fair play to put him in the river. There's some mystery . . . something wrong. [*Tittering.*] He . . . he . . . he! Not number thirteen for nothing.

KRAIG [*watching outside*]. How do you know there's anything wrong?

CAREN. That's telling, Sonny. [*With deep meaning.*] But you get wise quick . . . looking at the dead.

KRAIG. Ugh!

CAREN. People are telephoning and messengers are on the way. Pah . . . things like this are a nuisance. They keep one late. What are you watching?

KRAIG. That man who was here at the door. He doesn't go away. I wonder what keeps him here.

CAREN. Conscience! Scared to death he'll find his girl. Afraid not to look for her.

KRAIG. You mean? . . .

CAREN. Oh, there's just two things drives people into the water. The men . . . 'cause they've got too little inside 'em. . . . The women. . . .

KRAIG [*furious*]. Stop!

CAREN [*alarmed, yet brazen . . . scratching his head*]. He . . . he . . . he! Pretty clever little joke. He . . . he!

[*Kraig begins to pace the room, his hands pressed to his temples.*]

CAREN. I must tell that to the boys inside. [*He starts to go.*] Pretty clever little joke! . . .

KRAIG [*watching, excitedly*]. There's something wrong with the fellow. I'd better see.

CAREN [*pausing*]. You'd better shut your eyes and see nothing.

KRAIG. He is staggering.

CAREN. Let him stagger.

KRAIG. He may be ill. He may be — starving.

CAREN. He's come to a good place to lose his appetite.

KRAIG. Oh, let me see what's wrong with him . . . please.

CAREN. You go out that door and you don't come back. [*A pause.*] I guess you'll stay.

KRAIG [*looks his hatred*]. Just as you say.

[*Outside the door there is a short, sharp scream.*]

VOICE. Maria!

KRAIG. He's fallen.

CAREN. He'll get up.

KRAIG. I wonder what happened.

CAREN. Perhaps he got a peep at the new blonde. [*There is now a violent banging on the door.*]

KRAIG. He's here.

[*Caren opens the door cautiously a crack.*]

VOICE [*outside*]. My woman! . . . Maria!

CAREN. If you can identify her shut up your racket. Go to the first door at the right and make arrangements to take her away.

VOICE [*crushed and broken*]. Maria.

CAREN. Shut up! Bottle the tears until you get home. The first door to the right.

VOICE [*pleading*]. Cover her. For the love of the Lord . . . cover her. Don't let her lie like that.

CAREN. Ain't she covered enough to suit you?

VOICE. Cover her . . . cover her.

CAREN. Afraid she'll catch cold? Go on . . . get out! [*He slams the door.*]

KRAIG [*walks to the black curtains and parts them slightly*]. His woman . . . his LOVE. [*Sighing and glancing towards the door.*] Poor devil!

CAREN. What's the matter with you, Softy?

KRAIG. Nothing. I was just thinking.

CAREN. Don't be a fool.

KRAIG [*again walking back and looking at the woman*]. Couldn't we cover her just a little? The sheet seems to have slipped.

CAREN. And no harm done. Meat's meat.

KRAIG [*dreamily*]. Her hair would cover her like a mantle. How soft and white she is. And how happy she seems. I wonder just when that look came into her face. It surely wasn't there when she plunged into the river.

CAREN [*annoyed*]. You ought to be nurse maid to a doll baby. What are you anyway?

KRAIG [*indifferently*]. A dreamer . . . a creator . . . a starver!

CAREN. Well, you're the wrong sort for in here. This is one place where you get down to facts; truth. No lies, no frills, no dreams. Dreams don't count [*banging his fist for emphasis*]. Money don't count. Power don't count . . . beauty don't count. Nothing counts.

KRAIG [*hotly*]. Then it's not truth if beauty and dreams don't count. That's what we starved for, Martha and I.

CAREN [*softening a little*]. Well, you won't starve here. It's a fair place . . . fair. The King himself wouldn't be treated no different than a beggar. The man with brains and the man without. . . . . [*The curtains part and a helper enters.*]

HELPER. Some one wants to blink at number thirteen. He's got two swell dames with him. Can they go in?

CAREN. If their permit's all right. Yes. Bring them in.

HELPER. They won't come in here. They want to go in the private way.

CAREN. I know there's some mystery about number thirteen. . . .

HELPER. Yes, there is. He's a swell . . . a big one. I shouldn't wonder if. . . .

CAREN. Go on. Get out. [*The helper goes.*]

KRAIG. Aren't you going to cover the boy before you let them enter?

CAREN. If they can't see him how are they going to know him? He ain't a tailor's dummy.

KRAIG. It all seems horrible.

CAREN. I guess you'll never see a second day at this.

KRAIG. Oh. . . . Oh, I don't know.

CAREN. You think I'm going to tuck on a few extras just because he's a swell. [*Yelling.*] Don't I keep telling you 'til there's not a breath left in my body, that there ain't no class here? [*The helper reënters and hears the last words. He stands breathless.*] Tramp or gentleman, they're all alike. Now get that into your head and let it grow.

HELPER [*has been stammering trying to speak*]. I oughtn't to tell. They'd kill me if they knew. It's to be kept a secret, but . . .

CAREN. What's the matter?

HELPER. Number thirteen . . . [*Stammering.*] He . . . he. . . .

CAREN. Well, what about him?

HELPER. He ain't a loafer. He ain't a tramp. He ain't even a gentleman. He . . .

CAREN. Who is he? Quick!

HELPER. Our . . . [*Exultantly.*] Our King!

CAREN [*open-mouthed, aghast*]. Our . . . King!

KRAIG [*laughing triumphantly*]. Ha . . . ha . . . ha . . . ha — HERE! [*He clasps his hands together.*]

CAREN [*excited*]. Are you mad, Boy, mad? Our King! Oh!

[*Kraig laughs. Both men stare at him horrified.*]

HELPER [*to Caren*]. Ain't you got a flag or something . . . some little mark of respect to cover his nibs?

CAREN [*to Kraig*]. Run upstairs and get that big silk flag that . . . [*as Kraig does not move*]. Go.

KRAIG [*immovable, abruptly ceasing to laugh*]. No.

CAREN [*threateningly*]. What do you mean? No?

KRAIG [*hysterically*]. This is one place in the world where all are treated fair. Dreams don't count. POWER don't count. There's no rich, no poor. . . .

CAREN. Shut up and get that flag.

KRAIG. You're going to cover him . . . but she . . . Oh! [*Both men disappear behind the curtains, cringing and bowing to people within. Caren, with his back to the curtains, does not realize that he is alone.*] Even death can't level. No . . . not even death. [*For a second he stares ahead of him piercingly into space, standing taut and rigid. Then commences to laugh in pure hysteria as*

[*The Curtain Slowly Falls.*]

A DEATH IN FEVER FLAT

A Play

By George W. Cronyn

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SCENE: *In the great Far West, i. e., far from the "Movie" West.*

CHARACTERS

HANK [*proprietor of the Good Hope Roadhouse*].
LON PURDY [*about whom the play is concerned*].
MIZPAH [*his wife, called "Padie"*].
THE STAGE DRIVER.
THE GHOST OF HARVEY MACE.
THE GHOST OF THE OTHER MAN.

THE TIME *is the present, about 11 P. M.*

This is not a Bret Harte play, nor is it designed for W. S. Hart. And it should be performed with none of that customary and specious braggadoccio of western plays.

A DEATH IN FEVER FLAT

A Play

By George W. Cronyn

[The Scene *is laid in the so-called dining-room of one of those forlorn hostelries of the great Plains, which goes by the name of Mace's Good Hope Roadhouse, a derisive title evidently intended to signify the traveler's hope of early escape from its desiccated hospitality.*

This room is sometimes reluctantly frequented by a rare guest, usually a passenger on his way via auto stage, to some place else, whom delays en route have reduced to this last extremity of lodging for the night. The room is a kind of lumber yard of disused cheap hotel furniture.

Nothing can be drearier.

Most of this junk is heaped along the left (stage) wall, and it has a settled look of confusion which the processes of gradual decay will, apparently, never disturb. Tables tip crazily against the plaster of the greasy wall. Chairs upturned on these, project thin legs, like the bones of desert places, toward a ceiling fantastically stained. One table smaller than the rest, sees occasional use, for it stands somewhat out of the débris and has about it three chairs reasonably intact. A pack of cards and several dirty glasses adorn the top.

A stairway rises along the right wall, beginning at the rear, and attaining to a rickety landing, supported by a single post of doubtful strength, to which is affixed a glass lamp in a bracket. (Inasmuch as the stairway is turned away from the audience, those who ascend are completely hidden until their heads top the last riser.) At the right front, between the landing and the proscenium, a door (now shut) leads to the Bar, the one spot of brightness in this lump, the shining crack at its sill bespeaking the good cheer beyond. And that crack is the only illumination to this morgue of defunct appetites, for the moonlight, which enters by way of a small window at the right, is rather an obscuration, inasmuch as it heightens the barren mystery of the room's entombing shadows.

Double doors center of rear wall lead to the outside. A window on either side of the door.

So much for the melancholy set.

From the Bar percolates the lubricated melodiousness of the few regular customers who constitute the population of Fever Flat, with the exception of three worn-out women folks, two haggard cows and three hundred or so variegated dogs. The female element are to home, the dogs, astray and astir, with lamentable choruses.

Sounds from the Bar, samples only.]

A Jolly Soul [*hoarsely*]. Pitch into her, boys! Tune up your gullets! [*With quavering pathos.*] "She was born in old Kentucky"—

Another Such [*with peeve*]. Aw, shet up, that's moldy! Giv's that Tennessee warble, Hank!

Voice of Hank [*rather rich and fine*]. "When your heart was mine, true love,
And your head lay on my breast,
You could make me believe
By the falling of your arm
That the sun rose up in the west—"

[*There is a momentary pause, filled in by—*

A Voice. Y'oughter go courtin' with that throat o' yourn, Hank.

Mace [*as if misanthrope*]. Aw, women —

[*During the laugh that follows, an auto horn blares outside and a bright shaft is visible through the rear windows.*]

Voices. Stage's come! Stage's come!

[*There are sounds indicating the*

rapid evacuation of the Bar, and a moment later one of the rear doors is jerked open and the Stage Driver enters, dragging in two heavy suitcases which he deposits near the small table with appropriate grunts, meanwhile encouraging the passengers to enter.]

STAGE DRIVER. Uh! perty lumpy bags — come in, folks, come in! Seems like you might be carryin' all your b'longings.

[*The two passengers enter; the man, quickly, nervously, almost furtively; the woman, with that weariness which ignores everything except its own condition.*]

STAGE DRIVER. Come in and set, lady; don't be skeered. Looks a little spooky, but Hank'll have a glim fer ye in two shakes. [*Places a chair for her.*] Here, I know you're plumb tuckered. Make y'self t'home. [*Looking around at the drear surroundings.*] 'S fer 's yer able.

THE MAN. I thought the stage went through to Hollow Eye to-night?

DRIVER. Well, sir, she do, but this time she don't. I've been havin' to run ten miles on low already and I jest don't *dast* take her across that thirty miles of sand the way she is. She'll drink water like a thusty hoss and like as not lay down and die on us half way out. Then where'd we be? No sir; you folks'll just have to camp here at Fever Flat till I kin do a tinkerin' job to-morrow mornin'. So I'll step into the Bar and tell Hank you're here. [*At the door to the Bar.*] Hank'll do the best he kin fer ye. He's a squ'ar man. Good-night to ye! [*Goes out, leaving the door half open.*]

THE MAN [*briefly*]. Good-night. [*Looking about.*] What a hole! Like somebody died here and they'd gone off and left it all stand just the way it was. [*He goes to the open door at the rear and stares at the naked moonlit buttes.*] Them hills gits my goat. They're nothin' but blitherin skeletons, and this bunch of shacks they call Fever Flat looks like no more'n a damn bone yard to me. [*Shutting the door.*] Ugh! it's cold in here. Feel like I was sittin' on my own grave's edge.

THE WOMAN [*scarcely raising her head, and speaking with no emotion, in a dead dry voice.*] You didn't use to be so pernickety, when you was punchin' on the range, Lon.

LON [*waspishly*]. And you didn't use to look like a hag, neither, Padie.

PADIE [*with a momentary flash*]. Drink's poisoning your tongue, too.

LON [*viciously*]. Who's drinking? Cain't I take a thimbleful now'n then without all this jawin'?

PADIE. You ain't takin' thimblefuls. You're just soakin' it up. You'll be gettin' snakes if you keep on. 'n then, what'll *I* do? [*Resuming her air of weary indifference.*] Not that I care so much what you do with yourself — or what becomes of me. Nothing matters.

LON [*petulent and aggrieved*]. There you go, actin' abused. How 'bout *my* rights 'n pleasures? Ain't got none, I s'pose.

PADIE. Oh, shut up, you make me sick.

[*Hank enters; a ruddy, vigorous, young man, strangely out of place among all this rubbish. He wears a barkeeper's apron and speaks cordially.*]

HANK. Howdyedo, folks! Howdye do! Well, this is a kinda rough lay-out fer you-all. Y'see the Stage is due here at five, and stops fer grub, then makes Hollow Eye by about nine, but here 'tis . . . [*pulls out watch*] half an hour of midnight an' I s'pose you ain't et, yet, eh? [*Lights the glass lamp.*]

PADIE. Thanks. We've had sandwiches, but maybe my husband'd like something.

LON [*significantly*]. Wet.

[*Padie shrugs indifferently, and fixes her hair. As she turns toward Hank, the light for the first time falls full on his face. Padie stares fixedly at him, and half rises, with a little cry.*]

LON [*with a quick, startled glance at Hank, speaks to her in a sharp, threatening voice*]. Padie! Sit down! Are you gittin' plumb loco drivin' out so late in autymobiles? [*To Hank, apologetically.*] You kinda flustered us, mister, cause you have a little the look a friend of ourn that died suddint. Mournful case. Pardner o'mine. No, you're not much like. He was tall, heavy-built and lighter complected. Must a been consid'ble older, too.

PADIE [*almost in a whisper*]. No.

LON. Older, I say. My wife's kinda wrought up by this here little spell of travelin'.

HANK [*sympathetically*]. Oh, you're not used to it, eh?

PADIE [*slowly and deliberately*]. We've been at it — [*draws out the word into a burden*] years.

LON [*impatiently*]. That is, off'n on, m'dear. Only off'n on.

PADIE [*monotonously*]. All the time.

HANK [*trying to be a little jocose to break the oppressive atmosphere*]. Should think you might hanker after yer own nest, lady.

PADIE [*rising rudely*]. Well, just keep your thoughts!

HANK [*completely abashed*]. Yes, ma'am. Your room is just at the top of the landin'. I'll make ye a light. [*He hustles away upstairs to cover his embarrassment, taking the suitcases with him.*]

LON [*irritably*]. You're always tryin' to belittle me in public. Is that any way fer a wife to act? I wanta know.

PADIE. What do you always lie so fer?

LON [*with rising voice*]. That's my business. I'll do as I damn please. And don't you go too fer, crossin' me. I won't stand it. Some day I'll up, an —

PADIE [*contemptuously*]. Beat me. That's all that's left to *you*, wife-beater.

[*Lon raises his hand as though to strike her, but lets it fall as Hank reappears on the landing.*]

HANK. Excuse me, m'am. Have you your own towels by you? Ourn is pretty scaly. It's been so long since we've had in women folks, at least, ladies.

PADIE [*moving toward the stair*]. Thanks, we have some.

[*Lon to Padie as Hank, hidden from audience, descends.*]

LON. You might as well be decent, Padie. You ain't got none other but me.

PADIE [*bitterly*]. Yes, you've took me from 'em. We've been trapsin and trapsin till I'm plumb sick. Yes, I'm —

[*Her voice breaks and she runs blindly toward the stair, almost into the arms of Hank, which further increases his consternation.*]

HANK [*holding her off*]. Stidy, stidy. There's the ladder, m'am. Can't I fetch you somethin'? Toddy?

[*Padie shakes her head, runs up, and slams her door.*]

HANK [*to Lon in friendly fashion*]. Women folks is cur'us, cur'us.

LON [*surlily*]. Take my advice and keep free from 'em.

HANK. It was a woman did fer my brother.

LON [*with increased interest*]. Oh, you've got a brother, eh?

HANK [*simply*]. Had.

LON. Where is he?

HANK. Down at Laguna Madre, Arizony.

LON [*leaning forward and gripping the edge of the table*]. Ranchin'?

HANK. Buried.

LON [*haltingly*]. How — what were you saying — about a woman?

HANK. A woman done fer him. That's what they said, I don't know. I didn't git there fer a long time. There was a mix-up.

LON. Well, well. That's strange.

HANK [*eagerly*]. I s'pose you heard of it? It was in all the papers. It even got as fer as Denver.

LON. No, I don't remember. But I've read of similar cases.

HANK. You've been to Arizony, I s'pose.

LON. No, not quite. I've been all around them parts, but never Arizony.

HANK. 'Tain't what you'd call a perty country, but it's mighty satisfyin'. Too blame cold up here.

LON. Why don't you move?

HANK. I'm agoin' to, but you see my brother had half interest in this here tavern and there was some litigation about it. Case's just finished. I been here three years, ever since he went. But I'm pullin' my stakes, you bet. I wouldn't be *buried* here! Would you?

LON [*dryly*]. I'd rather not.

HANK. So she took me fer a friend that'd croaked, eh? That's cur'us.

LON. Eh? What's that? Who?

HANK. Your wife.

LON. Oh, yes. Well, he was a good ten years older. And dark-complected.

HANK. Thought you said he was light.

LON. Mebbe I did. Well, he mought have been a trifle lighten'n you, but then, size him up by the average, he was dark. Let's fergit him. Bring us a bottle of

your best — and see that the glass is clean.

HANK. To be sure. [*Goes out.*]

[*Lon sits with his head between his hands, brooding. The voice of Hank rises from the Bar, rendering the second verse of the Tennessee "warble."*]

HANK [*in the Bar*].

There's many a girl can go all round about
And hear the small birds sing.
And many a girl that stays at home alone,
And rocks the cradle and spins.

[*As the song ends, the door at the rear opens soundlessly, revealing the vast expanse of moonlit plains and desolate buttes. Lon shivers and turns up his coat collar, finally facing about to discover the cause of the chill. Observing the open door, he goes to it, closes and locks it, the click of the key being distinctly audible. He then returns and sits as before, and again the song comes.*]

HANK [*in the Bar*].

There's many a star shall jangle in the west;
There's many a leaf below.
There's many a damn that will light upon the man
For treating a poor girl so.

[*Now both of the double doors swing open, without sound. Lon shivers, then, looking over his shoulder, suddenly gets up, glares about him and makes hastily for the door to the Bar, where he almost collides with Hank entering with bottle and glass.*]

HANK. Here, mister, I was just comin'.

LON. What the devil's the matter with your doors?

HANK. Them? Oh, the lock's no good. When the wind's southwest they fly right open. Got to be wedged with a shingle.

[*He goes over to the doors, slams them shut, picks up a shingle from the floor and inserts firmly between them.*]

LON [*relieved*]. H'm. Well, that's all right.

HANK. Now it's blame cur'us the way old places gits. You'll hear these floor boards creak at times like as if som'un was sneakin' over 'em b'ar-foot. Feller told me onct it was made by contrapshun and temper'ture. Mebbe so, but I reckon [*knowingly*] there's more goes on around than we give credit fer.

[*Hank dusts off the table and puts bottle and glass down. Lon seizes them eagerly and begins drinking.*]

LON [*after a couple of glasses*]. You mean — spirits?

HANK. Well, I dunno as you'd call 'em that. But it's a fact, there's more liquor goes over the Bar than gits paid for. 'Tain't *stole* either. It just *goes*. . . . As old Pete Gunderson used to say, "I'm a hell of a th'usty p'uson, and when I croak I'll be a hell of a th'usty spirit." I sometimes wonder —

[*Padie appears above, in a loose dressing sack, her hair hanging in a great wavy mass, and holding a pitcher.*]

PADIE. Lon, please fetch some water.

LON [*not moving*]. I don't dast go out in the night. I've caught a kind of chill from to-day's drive.

HANK [*going up the stairs*]. I'll fetch it you, m'am.

[*She comes down to meet him and the two are momentarily hidden from the audience. Lon continues to drink steadily, pouring down one glass after another. Hank reappears, treading with a certain gayety, and goes out rear, whistling the Tennessee "warble."*]

PADIE [*leaning out of the shadow of the stairway toward her husband*]. Ain't you comin' up soon, Lon?

LON [*ignoring the query*]. Scarcely no resemblance whatever.

PADIE [*with sudden fierceness*]. You lie!

[*She ascends to the top of the landing. Outside a pump cranks dismally.*]

PADIE [*relenting a little*]. You'll be seein' things, Lon, if you keep it up.

LON [*rising, perfectly steady*]. Mind your business. Wish to hell I had a newspaper.

[*He goes out through the door to the Bar, while Padie runs a comb reflectively through the exuberant tumult of her dark hair. Hank*

enters and stops a moment, half blinded by the light, then looks up, and shading his eyes, smiles.]

PADIE [*coyly*]. Is it the light in your eyes, mister?

HANK [*daringly*]. It's you, ma'am, are blinding them. [*He runs up the stairs with the pitcher.*]

PADIE [*bending toward him as he comes near the top steps*]. You'd better reach it to me. Maybe the landing'll not hold the two of us.

HANK. It'll hold two that have such light hearts as we.

PADIE. Ah, you don't know mine, mister.

HANK [*reaching her the pitcher*]. There, the clumsy mut I am! Spillt the cold water on your pretty bare toes!

[*As she leans over to take the pitcher her hair falls suddenly about his head, almost covering his face.*]

PADIE [*drawing it back, with a deft twirl*]. I've most smothered you!

HANK. I wouldn't want a sweeter death.

PADIE [*looking down into his eyes*]. Indeed, you're the picture of — an old lover of mine.

HANK. I'd rather be the picture of the new.

[*He makes as if to clasp her about the ankles, but she puts a hand on his shoulder and pushes him gently back.*]

PADIE. You've been very kind to a wanderer — from Arizony. Don't spoil it. Good-night!

HANK [*turning about, mutters*]. Good-night.

[*He clatters loudly down the stairs as Lon reënters, studying a newspaper. Lon seats himself, still absorbed. Hank favors him with a glare of positive hatred.*]

HANK [*with a sneer*]. All fixed fer the night, eh?

LON [*grunting*]. G'night.

HANK. Well, I hope you like this country better'n Arizony.

LON [*starting out of the news*]. The hell you say!

HANK. Your wife was wishing herself back there.

LON [*settling back to his paper and bottle*]. Well, that's where she come from. I don't. Women allus want what they ain't got.

HANK [*retiring*].

When your heart was mine, true love,
And your head lay on my breast,

[*He goes out, closing the door.*]

You could make me believe by the falling of your arm
That the sun rose in the west.

[*During the singing of this last stanza, the double doors swing wide as before, revealing a Figure standing motionless outside, bathed in moonlight. At the same time the flame in the glass lamp begins to flicker and wane. Lon holds the paper closer to his face, finally almost buries his nose in it, as if conscious of the Presence, but stubbornly resolved to ignore it. The Figure moves, and as it crosses the threshold the feeble light expires. Lon, however, still sits, as if absorbed in the newspaper, pretending to sip from the glass. The Figure in a thin mocking voice, echoes the song of the other, standing just behind Lon's chair.*]

THE FIGURE [*a thin echo*].

You could make me believe by the falling of your arm
That the sun rose up in the west.—

[*Lon picks up the soiled pack of cards from the table and begins to shuffle them mechanically, nor does he once turn toward the apparition.*]

LON [*in a hoarse whisper*]. And what'r *you* doin' here?

[*The Figure sits down nonchalantly in a chair a little to one side of Lon's. He is dressed in the western style, that is, without style, corduroys, heavy boots, flannel shirt. In fact, he looks almost natural. But there is a curious dark mark in the center of his forehead — or is it a round, dark hole?*]

LON [*petulantly*]. Cain't you stay where you was put — with a heap o' rocks on top o' ye?

THE FIGURE [*thinly ironical*]. Can't seem to give up the old habits, y' know.

LON [*thickly, tossing the pack down*]. What's the hell's a corpse got to do with habits?

GHOST [*unmoved*]. You pore fool, you'll *learn* when you come over.

LON [*huskily*]. Come over — wh'ar?

GHOST [*significantly*]. Where I am. [*Sings in a quavering voice.*]
There's many a girl can go all round about
And hear the small birds sing —

LON [*snarling*]. Dry up on them corpse tunes o' yourn, Harvey Mace.

GHOST [*leering*]. Oh, you recognize me, eh? You recognize your old friend and pardner, do you, Lon Purdy?

LON [*sullenly*]. I *knowed* you'd come.

GHOST [*triumphantly*]. And you believe in me, eh? Well, that's good, too.

LON [*stubbornly*]. Believe? Well! I knowed I'd be seein' things soon, what with the booze. I knowed it'd be the snakes or you. Padie told me I'd be seein' things.

GHOST [*maliciously*]. So you believe in *her,* anyway. Well, how's Padie — and the children?

LON. You know damn well we ain't had none.

GHOST. What, no children! How unfortunate! The house of love not to be graced with fruit . . . sterile, sterile.

LON [*belligerently*]. Er you referrin' to me?

GHOST. To your spiritual union only, my friend. Physically, I know, nothing was wanting for a perfect match, — female form divine to mate with big blond beast. A race of superpeople!

LON. What the hell 'r' you gabbin'? You allus had a lot of talky-talk. That's what made a hit with Padie, before, before —

GHOST. Before the Other Man came along and cut us both out. [*Sings.*]
And many a girl that stays at home alone
And rocks the cradle and spins.

GHOST [*reflectively*]. Yes, I'm afraid we both stood up pretty poorly alongside him. I had the words, the brain, the idea. I could charm her, tantalize her, quicken her mind, arouse her imagination. That's why I cut you out with her.

LON [*sneeringly*]. Gab!

GHOST. Yes, gab. It was one better to her than mere brute — guts! You personified strength. You didn't have nerves enough to be afraid of anything. You had endurance, cheek, deviltry, and a kind of raw good nature. These took with the gay, immature girl she was, until I came. You had — Guts; I had — Gab.

LON. And the Other Feller?

GHOST. He had the Gift.

LON. What you mean?

GHOST. He was a full man. His personality exuded from him like incense. It wrapped and enfolded you and warmed you, and yet it was not a grain feminine, but deeply, proudly masculine. You tolerated him, I — loved him. I had the fine passion for Padie, but when I first saw the two of them together I *knew* she was his, or [*with a keen, stern look at Lon*] *ought* to be . . . and she *has* been, always.

LON [*jumping to his feet, and knocking over his chair*]. You lie like hell! She's mine! She's been mine all these three years! I won her and I own her! What little of love she ever had fer you or him is buried down in Laguna Madre with the bones of both of ye! And all hell can't take her from me!

GHOST [*rising tall and pale*]. *He* kin, and he's done it! You *thought* you'd got her. But he's had her, or rather, she's had *him* in her heart ever since they took the rope from his neck and pronounced him legally dead, and justice vindicated, and laid him away in the desert. All that time since, he's belonged to her. When you laid by her side nights, it was *his* arm she felt about her waist, not yours; his breath was on her cheek, and his heart was beating against hers. Oh you poor, poor fool!

LON [*throwing his glass straight at the ghost*]. You lyin' pup!

GHOST [*bursting into a gale of eerie laughter*]. Ha! ha! ha! you *poor* fool! *Now* you believe in me!

[*Lon whips out his revolver and aims at the ghost, then slowly returns it to the holster, as he realizes the futility of the move.*]

GHOST. Go on, my boy! Let's have another one here. [*He points to the dark hole in his forehead.*]

[*Lon, wiping his own face with the back of his hand, and shuddering, slumps down into his seat and stares vacantly at the table.*]

GHOST. Another one, just like the last — for your friend and pardner. [*He*

stresses the words with intense irony.] Do you remember the *last* time you pulled that trick? What a foxy one it was! How astutely planned! *Planned,* my friend. I remember when we two went up the canyon together, just such a shining night as this, I asked you why you had borrowed — the Other Man's horse, and you said, yours was a little lame. Oh! excellent dissembler! Most crafty of liars! You *stole* that horse. You stole that horse to put a rope around the Other Man's neck! You knew the pinto was shod different from any pony in those parts. You knew where they'd track him to, when they found the job you'd done. Then we sat down to smokes and cards. And I remember the curious glitter in your eyes. I was dealing. [*The Ghost shuffles the cards on the table, then lays down the pack in front of Lon.*] Cut!

[*Lon mechanically obeys.*]

Ghost [*dealing*]. And after several hands, you brought up the subject of Padie. And I told you I was out of the race — and that you'd better get out too, because the best man already had her. And then — and then I sensed you were going to draw, and when I had my gun out, it was empty. Clever boy! You had it fixed right. And so you plugged me square. And the moon and stars went out for me and I dropped into the black gulf.

[*Lon, throwing his hand down, buries his face in his hands, groaning.*]

Ghost [*pitilessly*]. You left me with my face to the stars for the coyotes to find. Then, very coolly, you turned the Other Man's horse toward home and sent him off cracking. And you jumped to a piñon log that led off to a ledge of lava where your footprints wouldn't show. And you turned up in half an hour with the boys in town. Then you inquired casually where the Other Man was. You *knew,* you devil! You knew they'd never get an alibi from him for that night, 'cause — Padie was with him. Padie had her dear arms about his neck while you, clever dog! were out fixing to put a rope there. And you done it, too! *Won* her? Yes, you did — like hell! After the trial was all over, and the dead buried, me and him, you passed a dirty whisper around town about her, and then married her, to save her good name. That's how you won her.

[*There is an immense silence, broken only by the heavy breathing of Lon, which comes in rattling gasps.*]

Ghost [*sings*].

There's many a star shall jangle in the west,
There's many a leaf below,
There's many a damn that will light upon the man
For treating a poor girl so.

Ghost. But I ain't forgot all you done for me. Neither has the Other Man, [*with deep solemnity*] and he's come — to settle too —

Lon [*staggering up*]. No! I don't believe in you! You're nothin' at all! There ain't no —

[*Lon sways and catches at the table; as he swings around, the figure of Another stands outside the door, a tall figure with something white twisted about its neck. Lon with a cry of horror puts out his arms as if to ward off the apparition and backs slowly toward the left wall.*]

First Ghost [*coming toward him*]. Murderer! betrayer! We've come to settle!

Lon [*screaming*]. No! no! no! I don't believe —

[*He falls, and the pile of rubbishy furniture topples over on to him with a crash. The two apparitions vanish. The door to the bar is flung open and Hank leaps in, at the same moment that Padie appears above, whitely clad.*]

Padie. Lon! Lon! What's the matter?

Hank [*going toward the pile of stuff*]. Go back! It's something terrible.

[*He heaves the heavy pieces from the body and drags it out, as Padie, with a long cry, flies down the stairs. He feels the breast quickly and rises before Padie reaches the table.*]

Hank. I'm afraid he's done for.

Padie [*drawing a deep quivering breath*]. Oh.

Hank. He must 'a' fell.

Padie. I knew — drink'd do fer him.

HANK. Did you — love him — so much?

PADIE [*very low*]. Once — a little. [*With sudden, fierce joy.*] I don't care! Now — I kin — live!

HANK [*looking out over the desert where the dawn begins to show*]. Both of us.

[*Curtain.*]

THE SLAVE WITH TWO FACES

An Allegory

By Mary Carolyn Davies

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The Slave With Two Faces was first produced in New York City by the Provincetown Players, on January 25th, 1918, with the following cast:

Life, the Slave	*Ida Rauh.*
First Girl	*Blanche Hays.*
Second Girl	*Dorothy Upjohn.*
A Woman	*Alice MacDougal.*
A Man	*O. K. Liveright.*
A Young Man	*Hutchinson Collins.*
A Workman	*O. K. Liveright.*

And Others.

Scene designed by Norman Jacobsen. Produced under the direction of Nina Moise.
Incidental music written by Alfred Kreymborg.

THE SLAVE WITH TWO FACES

An Allegory

By Mary Carolyn Davies

[The Scene *is a wood through which runs a path. Wild rose bushes and other wood-things border it. On opposite sides of the path stand two girls waiting. They have not looked at each other. The girls wear that useful sort of gown which, with the addition of a crown, makes a queen — without, makes a peasant. The first girl wears a crown. The second carries one carelessly in her hand.*]

First Girl [*looking across at the other*]. For whom are you waiting?

Second Girl. I am waiting for Life.

First Girl. I am waiting for Life also.

Second Girl. They said that he would pass this way. Do you believe that he will pass this way?

First Girl. He passes all ways.

Second Girl [*still breathing quickly*]. I ran to meet Life.

First Girl. Are you not afraid of him?

Second Girl. Yes. That is why I ran to meet him.

First Girl [*to herself*]. I, too, ran to meet him.

Second Girl. Ah! he is coming!

First Girl. No. It is only the little quarreling words of the leaves, and the winds that are always urging them to go away.

Second Girl. The leaves do not go.

First Girl. Some day they will go. And that the wind knows.

First Girl. Why are you not wearing your crown?

Second Girl. Why should we wear crowns? [*She places the crown upon her head.*]

First Girl. Do you not know?

Second Girl. No.

First Girl. That is all of wisdom — the wearing of crowns before the eyes of Life.

Second Girl. I do not understand you.

First Girl. Few understand wisdom — even those who need it most —

Second Girl. He is coming! I heard a sound.

First Girl. It was only the sound of a petal dreaming that it had fallen from the rose-tree.

Second Girl. I have waited —

First Girl. We all long for him. We cry out to him. When he comes, he hurts us, he tortures us. He kills us, unless we know the secret.

Second Girl. What is the secret?

First Girl. That he is a slave. He pretends! He pretends! But always he knows in his heart that he is a slave. Only of those who have learned his secret is he afraid.

Second Girl. Tell me more!

First Girl. Over those who are afraid of him he is a tyrant. He obeys — Kings and Queens!

Second Girl. Then that —

First Girl. — Is why we must never let him see us without our crowns!

Second Girl. How do you know these things?

First Girl. They were told me by an old wise man, who sits outside the gate of our town.

Second Girl. How did he know? Because he was one of those who are kings?

First Girl. No. Because he was one of those who are afraid.

Second Girl [*dreamily*]. I have heard that Life is very beautiful. Is he so? I have heard also that he is supremely ugly; that his mouth is wide and grinning, that his eyes slant, and his nostrils are thick. Is he so? — or is he — very beautiful?

First Girl. Perhaps you will see — for yourself — Ah!

SECOND GIRL.

[As Life saunters into view at the farthest bend of the path. He walks like a conqueror. But there is something ugly in his appearance. Life sees the girls just as a sudden sun-ray catches the jewels of their crowns. He cringes and walks like a hunchback slave. He is beautiful now.]

FIRST GIRL. He has seen our crowns!

SECOND GIRL. Ah!

FIRST GIRL. Remember! You are only safe — as long as you remain his master. Never forget that he is a slave, and that you are a queen.

SECOND GIRL *[to herself]*. I must never let him see me without my crown.

FIRST GIRL. Hush! He is coming!

SECOND GIRL. He is very beautiful —

FIRST GIRL. While he is a slave.

SECOND GIRL *[not hearing]*. He is — very beautiful —

FIRST GIRL. Life!

[Life bows to the ground at her feet.]

SECOND GIRL *[in delight]*. Ah!

FIRST GIRL. Life, I would have opals on a platter.

[Life bows in assent.]

SECOND GIRL. Oh-h!

FIRST GIRL. And pearls!

[Life bows.]

SECOND GIRL. Ah!

FIRST GIRL. And a little castle set within a hedge.

[Life bows.]

SECOND GIRL. Yes —

FIRST GIRL. I would have a fair prince to think tinkling words about me. And I would have a strawberry tart, with little flutings in the crust. Go, see that these things are made ready for me.

[Life bows in assent and turns to go.]

SECOND GIRL. Ah!

FIRST GIRL. See? It is so that one must act. It is thus one must manage him. So and not otherwise it is done. Now — do you try. *[She plucks a rose from a bush beside her, and twirls it in her fingers.]*

SECOND GIRL. Life! *[Life kneels.]* I have a wish for a gown of gold. *[Life bows.]*

FIRST GIRL. Yes!

[And over his bowed head, the two laugh gayly at the ease of his subjection.]

SECOND GIRL. And a little garden where I may walk and think of trumpets blowing.

[Life bows.]

SECOND GIRL. It is a good rule.

FIRST GIRL *[calling slave back as he is leaving]*. I have a wish for a gray steed. *[Life bows.]* Bring me a little page, too. With golden hair. And with a dimple.

[Life acquiesces, and starts to leave.]

FIRST GIRL *[calling him back with a gesture]*. Life! *[An important afterthought.]* With two dimples!

SECOND GIRL. And an amber necklace! Bring me an amber necklace!

FIRST GIRL *[tossing away the rose she has just plucked]*. And a fresh rose.

[Life bows; turns to obey. The two are convulsed with mirth at the adventure and its success.]

FIRST GIRL. Life!

[Life halts.]

SECOND GIRL. What are you going to do?

FIRST GIRL. Come here!

[Life comes to her. With a quick movement she snatches one of the gold chains from about his neck.]

SECOND GIRL *[frightened]*. How can you dare?

FIRST GIRL. What you see you must take. *[She seizes his wrist and pulls from it a bracelet.]*

SECOND GIRL *[frightened]*. Ah!

FIRST GIRL. Go!

[Exit Life.]

SECOND GIRL. But why —

FIRST GIRL. He does not like beggars, Life. You see, he is a slave himself.

SECOND GIRL. He is so beautiful.

FIRST GIRL. Do not forget that he is your slave. . . . This rosebush *[touches it]* is a queen who forgot.

SECOND GIRL. Ah!

FIRST GIRL *[pointing to bones that seemed part of bushes along roadside]*. Those are the bones of others who forgot.

SECOND GIRL. But he *is* beautiful!

FIRST GIRL. Only so long as you are his master.

SECOND GIRL. But he is kind!

FIRST GIRL. Only so long as you are not afraid of him.

SECOND GIRL. But you snatched —

First Girl. Life is the only person to whom one should be rude.

[*They hear sounds of moaning and cries and a harsh voice menacing some unseen crowd.*]

Second Girl. What is that?

First Girl. Come! We must not be seen! [*Pulls her companion behind bush at side of stage.*]

Second Girl. What will be done to us?

First Girl. Hush! If he should see you! He is always watching for the first sign of fear.

Second Girl. What is the first sign of fear?

First Girl. It is a thought —

Second Girl. But can he see one's thoughts —

First Girl. Only thoughts of fear.

Second Girl. If one hides them well even from oneself?

First Girl. Even then. But words are more dangerous still. If we say we are afraid we will be more afraid, because whatever we make into words makes itself into our bodies.

Voices Off Stage. Oh, master! Mercy, master!

First Girl. It spoils him, this cringing. It spoils a good servant. As long as he is kept in his place —

[*A man enters and kneels, looking at Life off stage, in fear.*]

First Girl [*steals to man and says*]. But he is only a slave. Do you not see that he is a slave?

Man. How can you say that? Look at his terrible face. Who that has seen his face can doubt that he is a master, and a cruel one?

First Girl. He cannot be a master unless you make him so.

Man. What is this that you are saying? Is it true?

First Girl. Yes, it is true. Even though it can be put into words it is true.

Man [*starts to rise, sinks to knees again*]. Yes. I see that it is true. But go away.

First Girl [*crouching behind bush again*]. Ah!

[*Life crosses the stage, with a whip of many thongs driving a huddled throng of half crouching men and women. They kneel and kiss his robe. His mouth is wide and grinning, his eyes slant, his nostrils are thick. He is hideous.*]

Life. You! Give me your ideals. Three ideals! Is that all you have?

Young Man. Life has robbed me of my ideals.

Workman. He robbed me too.

Young Man. But I had so few.

Workman. When you have toiled to possess more, he will take those from you also.

Life [*to an old woman*]. For twelve hours you shall toil at what you hate. For an hour you shall work at what you love, to keep the wound fresh, to make the torture keener.

Old Man. Ah, pity! Do not be so cruel! Let me forget the work I love!

Life. Dog! Take what I give you! It is not by begging that you may win anything from me!

A Voice. Give me a dream! A dream to strengthen my hands!

Another Voice. A little love to make the day less terrible!

Third Voice. Only rest, a little rest! Time to think of the sea, and of grasses blowing in the wind.

A Woman. Master!

[*Life lashes her with his whip. The woman screams. Life draws back from them, and dances a mocking dance, dancing himself into greater fury, laughing terribly, he lashes out at them. Several fall dead. He chokes a cripple with his hands. Finally he drives them off the stage before him, several furtively dragging the bodies with them.*]

Second Girl [*as the two emerge from their hiding place*]. Oh! I wish never to see his face as they saw it!

First Girl. You will not, unless you kneel — never kneel, little queen.

Second Girl. I shall never kneel to Life. I shall stand upright, as you have taught me, and I shall say, "Bring me another necklace, Life —"

First Girl. I must go now for a little while. I shall come back. Do not forget. [*She goes out.*]

Second Girl. I shall say —

[*Life's voice is heard off stage. Second Girl cowers. Life enters.*]

SECOND GIRL. Slave! I would have the chain with the red stone! [*As Life submissively approaches, she snatches it from his neck.*] And this!

[*Snatching at his hand and pulling the ring from a finger. The slave bows. She happens to look toward the spot where the bodies were, and shivers.*]

LIFE [*raising his head in time to see the look of horror. From this moment his aspect gradually changes until from the slave he becomes a tyrant*]. Are you afraid of me?

SECOND GIRL. No.

LIFE. There are many who are afraid of me.

SECOND GIRL. You are a slave.

LIFE. There are many who are afraid.

SECOND GIRL. You are only a slave.

LIFE. A slave may become a master.

SECOND GIRL. No.

LIFE. I may become —

SECOND GIRL. You are my slave.

LIFE. If I were your master —

SECOND GIRL. You are a slave.

LIFE. If I were your master, I would be kind to you. You are beautiful.

SECOND GIRL. Ah!

LIFE. You are very beautiful.

SECOND GIRL. It is my crown that makes me beautiful.

LIFE. If you should take your crown from your head, you would still be beautiful.

SECOND GIRL. That I will not do.

LIFE. You are beautiful as the slight burning of the apple-petal's cheek when the sun glances at the great flowers near it. You are beautiful as the little pool far in the forest which holds lily-buds in its hands. You are beautiful —

SECOND GIRL [*aside*]. I think he wants me to be afraid, so I will say it. I have heard that men are like that. I am not afraid, but I will say it to please him.

LIFE. Are you afraid of me?

SECOND GIRL. Yes.

LIFE. Are you afraid?

SECOND GIRL. Yes, I am afraid.

LIFE. Ah, that pleases me.

SECOND GIRL [*aside*]. I knew that I would be able to please him! Whatever I make into words makes itself into my body, she said, like fear — but she does not know everything! It is impossible that she should know everything! And it is so pleasant to please him — And so easy! I am not afraid of him. I have only *said* that I am afraid.

LIFE. Will you not take your crown from your head?

SECOND GIRL. No.

LIFE. There is nothing so beautiful as a woman's hair flying in the wind. I can see your hair beneath your crown. Your hair would be beautiful flying in the wind.

SECOND GIRL [*removes crown*]. It is only for a moment.

LIFE. Yes, you are beautiful.

SECOND GIRL [*to herself*]. It may be that I was not wise —

LIFE. You are like a new flower opening, and dazzling a passing bird with sudden color.

SECOND GIRL. She said that I must not —

LIFE. You are like the bird that passes. Your hair lifts like winks in the sun.

SECOND GIRL. He has not harmed me.

LIFE. Your crown is like jewels gathered from old galleons beneath the sea. May I see your crown?

SECOND GIRL [*holds it out cautiously toward him, then changes her mind*]. No —

LIFE. Let me hold it in my fingers. I shall give it back to you.

SECOND GIRL. No.

LIFE. I shall give it back.

SECOND GIRL. If you will surely give it back to me —

LIFE [*takes crown*]. But your hair is lovelier without a crown. [*Flings it from him.*]

SECOND GIRL. What have you done?

LIFE. It was only in jest.

SECOND GIRL. But you promised —

LIFE. In jest.

SECOND GIRL. But —

LIFE. Ho-ho! Laugh with me. What a jest!

SECOND GIRL [*laughs, then shivers*].

LIFE [*in high good humor with himself*]. Dance for me. You are young. You are happy. Dance!

SECOND GIRL. What shall my dance say?

LIFE. That it is Spring, and that there are brooks flowing, newly awakened and

mad to be with the sea. That there is a white bud widening under the moon, and in a curtained room a young girl sleeping. That the sun has wakened her —

SECOND GIRL [*dances these things. At first she is afraid of him, then she forgets and dances with abandon*]. And now give me back my crown.

LIFE. You do not need a crown, pretty one.

SECOND GIRL. I am afraid of you!

LIFE. Afraid of me! What have I done?

SECOND GIRL. I do not know.

LIFE. Do not be afraid.

SECOND GIRL. I am afraid.

LIFE. I shall be a kind master to you.

SECOND GIRL. Master?

LIFE. A kind master.

SECOND GIRL. You are my slave.

LIFE. I shall never be your slave again.

SECOND GIRL. And if she were right? If it is true?

LIFE. What are you saying?

SECOND GIRL. Nothing —

LIFE. You must call me master.

SECOND GIRL. No. That I will not do.

LIFE [*leering at her*]. Call me master. Then I shall be kind to you.

SECOND GIRL. No. I can not.

LIFE [*picks up his whip from the path, toying with the whip but laughing at her*]. Then I shall be kind.

SECOND GIRL. Master —

LIFE. It has a good sound.

SECOND GIRL. You will give me —

LIFE. Greedy one! Be grateful that I do not punish you.

SECOND GIRL. You would not strike me?

LIFE. If you do not obey —

SECOND GIRL [*whispering*]. You would not strike —

LIFE. You must kneel.

SECOND GIRL [*repeating*]. Never kneel, little queen —

LIFE. You must kneel to me.

SECOND GIRL. No.

LIFE [*raising the whip as if to strike*]. On your knees! Slave!

SECOND GIRL. You were kind! Life, you were kind! You said beautiful words to me.

LIFE. Kneel.

SECOND GIRL. You would be always kind, you said —

LIFE. Will you obey?

SECOND GIRL. I shall never —

[*Life curls his whip around her shoulders.*]

SECOND GIRL [*screams*]. Do not flog me. I will kneel. [*Kneels.*]

LIFE. So? In that way I can win obedience.

SECOND GIRL. Master!

LIFE. It has a good sound.

SECOND GIRL. Pity! Have pity!

LIFE. Do not whine. [*Kicks her.*]

SECOND GIRL [*rises staggering*]. Spare me!

LIFE. I shall beat you, for the cries of those who fear me are sweet in my ears. [*Beats her.*]

SECOND GIRL. Master!

LIFE [*flinging aside whip*]. But sweeter yet are stilled cries — [*He seizes her, they struggle.*]

SECOND GIRL. He is too strong — I can struggle no longer!

[*They struggle. Life chokes her to death and flings her body from him. Then laughing horribly he goes off the stage.*]

FIRST GIRL [*enters skipping merrily. Singing*].

Heigho, in April,
Heigho, heigho,
All the town in April
Is gay, is gay!

[*She plucks rose from bush.*]

Heigho, in April,
In merry, merry April,
Love came a-riding
And of a sunny day
I met him on the way!
Heigho, in April,
Heigho, heigho —

[*Suddenly seeing the body, she breaks the song, and stares without moving. Then she goes very slowly toward it, smooths down the dead girl's dress, and kneels beside the body. Whispers.*]

She was young . . . he was cruel. . . . [*Touches the body.*] She also was a queen. She snatched his trinkets. See, there on her dead neck is his chain with the red fire caught in gold. And on her finger his ring. But he was too strong . . . too strong. . . . [*She stands, trembles, cowering in terror.*] Life has

broken her . . . Life has broken them all. . . . Some day . . . I am afraid . . .

[*Life enters, still the ugly tyrant. She remains cowering. His eyes rove slowly over the stage, but she sees him a second before he discovers her. She straightens up just in time to be her scornful self before his eyes light upon her. As she speaks Life becomes the slave again.*]

First Girl [*carelessly flings rose down without seeing that it has fallen upon the body*]. Life! Bring me a fresh rose!

[*The slave bows abjectly and goes to do her bidding.*]

[*Curtain.*]

THE SLUMP

A Play

By Frederic L. Day

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THE SLUMP was first produced February 5, 1920, by "The 47 Workshop" with the following cast:

FLORENCE MADDEN.....*Miss Ruth Chorpenning.*
JAMES MADDEN.....*Mr. Walton Butterfield.*
EDWARD MIX.....*Mr. W. B. Leach, Jr.*

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TIME: *The Present. About four o'clock on a Saturday afternoon in December.*

THE SLUMP

A Play

By Frederic L. Day

[Scene: *A dingy room showing the very worst of contemporary lower middle-class American taste. The dining table in the center is of "golden oak"; and a sideboard at the left, a morris chair at the right and front, and three dining-room chairs (one of which is in the left rear corner, the others at the table) are all of this same finish. The paper on the walls is at once tawdry and faded. A tarnished imitation brass gas jet is suspended from the right wall, just over the morris chair. In the back wall and to the left is a door leading outside. Another door, in the left wall, leads to the rest of the house. A low, rather dirty window in the back wall, to the right of the center, looks out on a muddy river with the dispiriting houses of a small, grimy manufacturing city beyond. On the back wall are one or two old-fashioned engravings with sentimental subjects, and several highly-colored photographs of moving picture stars, each of them somewhat askew. A few pictures on the other walls are mostly cheap prints cut out of the rotogravure section of the Sunday paper. In the right-hand rear corner is an air-tight stove. The whole room has an appearance of hopeless untidiness and slovenliness. Close by the morris chair, at its right, is a phonograph on a stand. Outside it is a dull gray day. The afternoon light is already beginning to wane.*

As the curtain rises, James Madden is sitting behind the table in the center of the room. He is a rather small man of thirty-five, his hair just beginning to turn gray at the temples. Spectacles, a peering manner, and the sallow pallor of his face all suggest the man of a sedentary mode of life. His clothes are faded and of a poor cut, but brushed and neat. There is something ineffectual but distinctly appealing about the little man. Madden is working on a pile of bills which are strewn over the top of the table. He picks up a bill, looks at it, and draws in his under lip with an expression of dismay. He writes down the amount of the bill on a piece of paper, below six or seven other rows of figures. He looks at another bill, and his expression becomes even more distracted.]

Madden [*with exasperation*]. Oh!

[*He brings his fist down on the table with a limp whack, then turns and looks helplessly toward the door at the left. After a moment this door starts to open. Madden turns quickly to the front, trying to compose his face and busying himself with the bills. The door continues to open, and Mrs. Madden now issues from it lazily. She is thirty-two years old, and a good half head taller than her husband. Where he is thin and bony, she has already begun to lose her figure. Her yellow hair, the color of molasses kisses, is at once greasy and untidy, and seems ready to come to pieces. Her face is beginning to lose its contour — the uninspired face of a lower middle-class woman who has once been pretty in a rather cheap way. She is sloppily dressed in showy purple silk. Her skirt is short, and she wears brand new, high, shiny, mahogany-colored boots. She has powdered her nose.*]

Mrs. Madden [*uninterestedly, in a slow, flat, nasal voice*]. How long y' been home? Yer pretty late f'r Sat'rdy.

Madden [*still looking down and trying to control his feelings*]. The head book-

keeper kept me, checkin' up the mill pay roll. I been here [*consulting his watch*] just seven minutes.

MRS. MADDEN [*yawning*]. Thanks. Yer s' darn acc'rate, Jim. I didn' really wanta know.

[*He looks at another bill and writes down the amount on the same piece of paper as before, keeping his head averted so that she may not see his face.*]

MRS. MADDEN. Jim. [*With lazy self-satisfaction.*] Look up an' glimpse yer wifey in 'r new boots. [*She draws up her skirts sufficiently to show the boots.*]

[*He looks up unwillingly and makes a movement of exasperation.*]

MADDEN. Oh, Florrie!

MRS. MADDEN. W'at's a matter? Don'choo like 'em?

MADDEN. You didn't need another pair, Florrie.

MRS. MADDEN [*on the defensive*]. Y' wouldn' have me look worse 'n one o' these furriners, would y'? There's Mrs. Montanio nex' door; she's jus' got a pair o' mahogany ones an' a pair o' lemon colored ones. An' *her* husban's on'y a "slasher."

MADDEN. Slashers get a big sight more pay than under bookkeepers these days, Florrie.

MRS. MADDEN [*persuasively*]. Got 'em at a bargain, anyways. Jus' think, Jim. On'y twelve, an' they *was* sixteen. [*Madden groans audibly. She changes the subject hastily*]. W'at's a news down town?

MADDEN [*seriously*]. Florrie — [*He hesitates and then seems to change his mind. He relaxes and speaks wearily, trying to affect an off-hand manner.*] Nothin' much. [*Struck by an unpleasant recollection.*] Comin' home by Market Wharf I saw 'em pull a woman out o' the river.

MRS. MADDEN [*interested*]. Y' don' say, Jim. Was she dead?

MADDEN [*nervously*]. I . . . I don't know. I didn't stop. [*He passes his hand across his face with a sudden gesture of horror.*] You know, Florrie, I hate things like that!

MRS. MADDEN. Well — y' poor boob! Not t' find out if she was dead!

[*She gives an impatient shrug of the shoulders and passes behind him, going over to the back window and looking out aimlessly. Madden picks up another bill, regarding it malevolently. After a moment she turns carelessly toward him.*]

MRS. MADDEN. Jim. [*He does not look up.*] Say, Jim. I'm awful tired o' cookin'. There ain't a thing t' eat in th' house. Le's go down t' Horseman's f'r a lobster supper t'night, an' then take in a real show. Mrs. Montanio's tol' me —

MADDEN [*interrupting very gravely*]. Florrie. [*He rises to his feet.*]

MRS. MADDEN [*continuing without a pause*]. There's an awful comical show down t' th' Hyperion. Regal'r scream, they say. Mrs. Montanio —

MADDEN [*breaking in*]. Florrie, there's somethin' I got to say to you.

MRS. MADDEN [*a little sulky*]. I got lots I'd like t' say t' *you*. On'y I ain't sayin' it.

MADDEN [*more quietly*]. I wasn't goin' to say it now . . . not 'till I finished goin' through these. [*He makes a gesture toward the bills.*] But when I saw your new shoes, an' specially when you spoke o' goin' out to-night . . .

MRS. MADDEN. Well, why shouldn' I? I got t' have *some* fun.

MADDEN [*keeping his self-control*]. Look here, Florrie. D'you know what I was doin' when you came in?

MRS. MADDEN. I didn't notice. Figgerin' somethin', I s'pose. Y' always are.

MADDEN. This mornin' at the office I got called to the phone. The Excelsior Shoe Comp'ny said you cashed a check there yesterday for fifteen dollars. Said you bought a pair o' shoes . . . those, I suppose [*He looks at her feet. She turns away sulkily.*] . . . an' had some money left over. Check came back to 'em this mornin' from the bank.— "No funds."

MRS. MADDEN [*with righteous but lazy indignation*]. How'd I know there wasn't no money in th' bank?

MADDEN. If you kept your check book up to date you'd know.

MRS. MADDEN. W'at right they got not t' cash my check?

MADDEN [*still controlling himself*]. The bank don't let you overdraw any more. [*He glances back at the bills.*]

D'you know, I'm wonderin' why you didn't charge those boots.

MRS. MADDEN. I ain't got any account at th' Excelsior.

MADDEN. I guess it's the only place in town you haven't got one.— You don't seem to remember what salary I get.

MRS. MADDEN. Sure — I know. Ninety-five a month. Y' know mighty well I'm ashamed o' you f'r not gettin' more. Mrs. Montanio's husban'—

MADDEN [*breaking in*]. Hang the Montanios! [*More quietly.*] Don't you see what I'm gettin' at? Here it is the twelfth o' December; you know my pay don't come in till the end o' the month; an' here you go an' draw all our money out o' the bank . . . an' more. [*Turning toward the table.*] An' *look* at these bills!

MRS. MADDEN. James Madden, I like t' know w'at right you got t' talk t' me like that.

MADDEN [*thoughtfully*]. I've always argued it's the woman's job to run the house. [*He walks around the table from front to rear, passing to its left, and looking down at the bills. With conviction.*] It's no use! — I don't just see how we're goin' to get out of this mess; but I do know one thing. [*Advancing toward her from the rear of the table.*] After this *I'm* goin' to spend our money, even if I have to buy your dresses.

MRS. MADDEN [*with rising anger*]. If you say I've been extrav'gant, James Madden, yer a plain liar!

MADDEN [*biting his lip and stepping back a pace*]. Easy, Florrie! — I know you don't mean that, or —

MRS. MADDEN [*interrupting viciously*]. I do!

MADDEN [*persuasively*]. Look here, Florrie. We got to work this out together. There's no use gettin' mad. Prob'ly you aren't extravagant — really. Just considerin' the size o' my salary.

MRS. MADDEN. A pig couldn' live decent on *your* salary!

MADDEN. Other folks seem to get on, even in these times. What would you do if we had kids?

MRS. MADDEN. Thank the Lord we ain't got *them* t' think about.

MADDEN [*shocked*]. Florence!

MRS. MADDEN. Well, I guess anybody'd be glad not t' have kids with *you* f'r a husban'. Y' don't earn enough money t' keep a cat — let alone kids! An' jus' t' think they'd be like you!

MADDEN [*more surprised than angry*]. Florence — you're talking like a street woman.

MRS. MADDEN. Oh, I am, am I? Well, I guess you treat me like a street woman. Y' don' deserve t' have a wife.

MADDEN. Well, I don't guess I do. Not one like you!

MRS. MADDEN. That's right! That's right! You don' know how t' treat a lady.

MADDEN [*controlling himself*]. Look here, Florrie. Don't let's get all het up over this.

MRS. MADDEN. Who's gettin' het up? (*Bursting past him toward the door at the left.*] I wish t' God you was a gen'leman!

MADDEN. Florrie — *don't*!

MRS. MADDEN [*turning on him from the other side of the table*]. W'y don't y' go out an' dig in th' ditch? Y'd earn a damn sight more money th'n —

MADDEN [*with angry impatience*]. You *know* I'm not strong enough.

MRS. MADDEN. Bony little shrimp! Not even pep enough t' have kids!

MADDEN [*beside himself*]. Florence! [*Going toward her.*] I'm goin' to tell you some things I never thought I would. You're just a plain, common, selfish, vulgar woman! You don't care one penny for anybody except yourself. You an' your clothes an' your movies an' your sodas an' your candy! [*Mrs. Madden is glowering at him across the table. She is beginning to weep with rage.—Two or three times she opens her mouth as if to speak, but each time he cuts her short.*] Look at the way you been leavin' this house lately. [*He makes an inclusive gesture toward the room.*] The four years I've lived with you would drive a saint to Hell! [*Mrs. Madden marches furiously by him and over to her hat and coat, which are hanging from pegs at the right, just in front of the stove.*] I wish I'd never seen you!

MRS. MADDEN [*getting her coat and hat*]. D' y' think I'm goin' t' stay in this house t' be talked to like that? [*Putting on her hat viciously.*] D' y' think I'm

goin' t' stand that kind of a thing? [*Putting on her coat.—Sobbing angrily.*] I guess . . . you'll be . . . pretty sorry when I've . . . gone. [*Coming closer to him on her way to the outside door.*] If . . . if I *did* somethin' . . . if somethin' . . . *happened* t' me . . . I guess you . . . you wouldn't never . . . f'give yerself! [*She is at the door.*]

MADDEN. I don't worry about you. [*She turns on him at the door.*] You wouldn't do anything like that. You're too *yellow!*

MRS. MADDEN [*at the door. Sobbing, in a fury*]. You'll . . . see!

[*With one last glare at him, she turns, opens the door and goes outside, slamming the door behind her. Madden stares after her, almost beside himself. He takes several steps across the room, then crosses and recrosses it, trying to regain control of himself. Little by little his anger fades; the energy goes out of his pacing, and finally he approaches the table and sits down in his old place with a hopeless droop of the shoulders. He takes up another bill and looks at its amount helplessly, finally writing it down on the same piece of paper as before. He starts to add up the total of the bills he has already set down on the piece of paper. His hand moves mechanically. Suddenly a shadow crosses his face, as an idea begins to form itself in his mind. He looks straight ahead, his eyes opening wide with horror. With a sudden movement he springs up from the table and goes quickly to the window, where he looks out anxiously at the river. He turns back into the room, and passes his hand across his face with the same gesture of horror he used earlier in speaking to Mrs. Madden of the woman who had fallen into the river.*]

MADDEN. Ugh!

[*He returns to the table, his face dark with the fear that has seized him. At the table, he stands a moment, thinking. Once again he passes his hand across his forehead with the same gesture of horrified fear. He drops into the chair behind the table, still thoughtful. After a moment his face clears, and he shakes his head with an expression of disbelief. He bends again over the bills, and once more takes up his work of going over them. From outside comes the faint sound of some one whistling "Tell Me." Gradually the whistle grows louder and louder, as if the whistler were coming nearer up the street. There is a sharp rap at the door. Madden starts violently, and, jumping up, he goes quickly to the door. He opens it eagerly and slumps with obvious disappointment as Edgar Mix enters breezily. Mix is about twenty-five; a loosely put together, thin faced youth in a new suit of ready-made clothes which are of too blatant a pattern and much too extreme a cut to be in really good taste. He is whistling the refrain of "Tell Me."*]

MIX [*as he passes*]. H'llo, James. [*Without stopping for an answer, he crosses the room and starts to remove his hat and coat.*] Where's the sister?

MADDEN [*he has closed the door. Dully.*] She's gone out.

[*As if struck by an idea, Madden reopens the door and goes outside. He can be seen, looking first to the left, then to the right, and finally down at the river before him. Mix finishes taking off his outer garments, which he hangs with a flourish on pegs near the stove. He is still whistling the same refrain.*]

MIX. W'at's a matter with you? Tryin' t' freeze me out? [*His voice has the same flat quality as his sister's, but it is full of energy.*]

[*Madden does not appear to hear him. He now comes back into the house, shutting the door behind him. His face is anxious, a fact he tries to hide.*]

MADDEN. Did you want to see Florence? [*Mix pauses in his whistling.*]

MIX. Sure. Nothin' important, though. Just about a little party she said you an' she was goin' t' take me on t'night. [*He*

commences whistling cheerily the opening bars of his refrain.]

MADDEN [*dully*]. Sorry. I don't know anythin' about it.

[*Mix stops whistling suddenly and looks down with dismay. Then, with his hands in his pockets, he slowly whistles the four descending notes at the end of the third bar and the beginning of the fourth. He stops and shakes his head, then slowly whistles a few more bars of the refrain, starting where he just left off, and letting himself drop into the morris chair on the descending note in the fifth bar. After another brief silence he finishes the refrain, but with a sudden return of the same quick, light mood in which he entered. The refrain over, he begins again at the beginning and whistles two or three more bars. Madden has meanwhile sat down at the table and is again going over the bills.*]

MIX. Jim — ever get a piece runnin' in yer head so y' can't get it out? [*Madden is looking vacantly down at the bills.*] I s'pose I been w'istlin' that tune steady f'r three whole weeks. [*He whistles three or four more bars of the same refrain.*] Like it? [*Madden does not appear to have heard him.*] P'raps Florrie's got th' record f'r that on th' phornograph. Has she, Jim? It ain't been out long.

MADDEN [*impatiently*]. Oh, I don't know, Ed.

MIX [*after whistling very softly a bar or two more*]. I see some girl fell in the river.

MADDEN [*startled*]. What?

MIX. Yep. They was tryin' t' make her come to. No use. She was a goner all right.

MADDEN [*rising from his chair. Trying to control himself.*] Where was this?

MIX. Oh, not s' far below here. Saw her m'self, I did.

MADDEN [*with increasing fear. Taking a step or two toward Mix.*] Did you see her face?

MIX. Nope. Somethin' 'd struck her face. Y'd hardly know she was a woman, 'cept f'r her clothes.

MADDEN [*wildly. Coming closer*]. How long ago?

MIX. W'at y' gettin' s' het up about? [*Madden is almost frantic.*] Oh . . . 'bout 'n hour.

[*Madden relaxes suddenly. The reaction is almost too much for him. He slowly goes back to the table.*]

MADDEN [*nervously*]. Oh . . . down by Market Wharf?

MIX. Sure. Did y' see her? [*Maddon sits down heavily.*]

MADDEN. Uhuh.

[*For a second or two there is silence. Madden rearranges the bills in front of him. Mix lolls in the armchair, whistling very softly.*]

MADDEN. Ed.

MIX. Uhuh.

MADDEN. Would you call Florrie a . . . a . . . well one o' them high-strung girls?

MIX. Gosh, no!

MADDEN. You don't think she'd be the sort to fly off the handle an' do . . . well, somethin' desp'rate?

MIX. Come off. You know's well's I do, Florrie's nothin' but a big jelly fish.

MADDEN. Ed — I don't want you to talk that way about Florrie. You don't 'preciate her.

MIX. Well, w'at's bitin' *you?* W'at y' askin' all these questions f'r, anyways?

MADDEN [*dully*]. Oh, nothin'.

[*Madden looks down uneasily at the bills, but without giving them any real attention. Mix yawns and lazily shifts his position in the armchair.*]

MADDEN. Ed — I do want to ask you somethin'.

MIX [*indifferently*]. Shoot.

MADDEN. I want you to tell the truth about this, Ed. Even if you think it will hurt my feelings. It won't.

MIX. Spit it out.

MADDEN. Just what sort of a chap do you think I am?

MIX [*considering*]. Huh! That's easy. D' y' really wanta know w'at I think?

MADDEN [*gravely*]. I cert'nly do.

MIX. Well — if you really wanta know, *I* think yer a damn good kid [*Madden looks suddenly grateful*] . . . but a bit weak on th' pep.

MADDEN [*a trifle dubiously*]. Thanks.

[*Thoughtfully.*] You don't think I'm unfair?

MIX. Unfair? Why, no. How d' y' mean?

MADDEN. Well . . . here in the house, f'r instance.

MIX. Lord, no, Jim! Yer s' easy goin' it'd be a holy shame f'r any one t' slip anythin' over on y'. [*After a short pause. Suspiciously.*] W'at y' askin' all these questions f'r, anyways?

MADDEN. Oh — nothin'.

MIX [*struck with an idea.—Starting up from his chair*]. *I* know w'at's bitin' you. You an' Florrie's had a row. [*He walks up to Madden and taps his arm familiarly with the back of his hand.*] Come on. Own up! [*He passes around behind Madden until he stands behind the chair at the left of the table.*]

MADDEN. Well . . . we did have a . . . a sort of a . . . disagreement.

MIX. I bet y' did. Look here, Jim. W'at's a use o' takin' it s' hard?

MADDEN [*gravely*]. The trouble is — [*He breaks off*] I guess I was mostly in the wrong.

MIX [*sitting down vehemently*]. Tell that to a poodle! I know you an' I know Florrie. I guess I know who'd be in the wrong, all right. She was bad enough w'en y' firs' got sweet on 'r — jus' a lazy fool, ev'n if she did have a pretty face. Gee, how you did fall f'r her face! Moonin' round an' sayin' how *wonderful* she was! [*He chuckles.*] An' Florrie twenty-eight years old . . . an' jus' waitin' t' fall into yer arms.

MADDEN. Ed — don't say things like that, even in fun.

MIX. Hell! It's the truth. . . . But lately Florrie's jus' plain slumped. She's nothin' now but a selfish, lazy pig.

MADDEN [*angrily*]. I won't have you talk that way about Florrie. She's made me a good wife . . . on the whole. She don't go trapesin' off like some o' your fly by nights. She's affection'te . . . an' good tempered . . . an'—[*Mix is grinning incredulously.*]

MIX. Rats! Yer havin' a damn hard time t' say anythin' real nice about 'r. I wouldn' stretch th' truth s' far 's *that* [*snapping his fingers.*] f'r her, ev'n if she is m' sister.

MADDEN [*vehemently*]. Ed — if you can't talk decently about a nice girl like Florrie, I guess you better get out.

MIX [*slowly rising from his chair*]. Well I'll be damned! All right, I *will* go. . . . Yer crazy, Jim!

MADDEN [*rising and putting a restraining arm on Mix's shoulder. Nervously*]. Don't mind me, Ed. I didn't really mean what I said. I'm all upset.

MIX. Sh'd think y' were. [*After a slight hesitation, he sits down again.*] W'at y' quarrelin' 'bout? Money?

MADDEN [*sitting down again*]. Uhuh.

MIX. Huh! Thought as much. . . . As I was sayin', I know Florrie.

MADDEN. It really wasn't her fault.

MIX [*slowly and emphatically*]. Well, you are sappy. Ever'body knows Florrie spends more money th'n you an' all my family put t'gether.

MADDEN. You wouldn't have me deny her *ev'rythin'?* . . . She's got to have *some* fun.

MIX. But, Lord, man, y' don't earn th' income of a John D. Rockefeller.

MADDEN [*somberly*]. I know. . . . I ought to do much better. But that isn't *her* fault. Besides, she's learned her lesson.

MIX. Well, I'll be damned! T' hear you talk this way. O' course, y' kep' yer mouth pretty well shut. But we all figgered you was havin' th' devil's own time with Florrie!

MADDEN [*rising from his seat. With deep feeling*]. Ed — [*He turns and goes over to the window, looks out and then faces around*]. I never knew . . . till just now . . . how fond I was of her.

[*Mix regards him with a puzzled expression. Madden begins to walk up and down the floor, at first slowly and thoughtfully, then more and more nervously. The light outside begins to fade.*]

MIX [*after a pause. Looking up at Madden*]. Jim. Y' never c'n tell w'at these women 're goin' t' do — can yer?

MADDEN [*stopping abruptly. Intensely*]. I s'pose not, Ed. [*He goes on a few steps and then stops again.*] Even . . . even when they're not . . . high strung.

[*Madden continues his nervous pacing of the floor. Mix watches him with increasing annoyance.*

MADDEN [*suddenly*]. Was that a footstep?

[*Mix shakes his head. Madden goes quickly to the window and looks out. From there he rushes to the door and peers out, first to one side and then to the other. He shuts the door, and with a hopeless look on his face comes back into the room. Outside the light is steadily fading.*]

MIX [*slowly rising from his chair, a look of still greater annoyance on his face*]. I guess Florrie ain't comin' f'r some time. I'll be goin'. [*He goes over toward his coat and hat.*]

MADDEN [*nervously*]. Why don't you drop into Smith's soda parlor? That's where she always is, this time o' the afternoon.

MIX. She ain't there, I don't guess. . . . I jus' come from there m'self.

MADDEN [*intensely*]. You did?

MIX. Sure.

MADDEN [*wildly*]. Ed — I can't stand this waitin' f'r her any more. [*He goes quickly and gets his hat and coat from a peg near the stove.*] I'm goin' out.

[*Madden goes swiftly across the room to the door at the back and goes out. He is seen to pass outside in front of the back window. Mix takes a few involuntary steps after him toward the door, then stops and gives a low whistle of astonishment. After a moment he turns and starts back toward his hat and coat.*]

MIX [*half aloud*]. Poor ol' Jim.

[*He gets his hat and coat, and puts them on. In the course of a few seconds the reflective look has gone from his face; he begins to whistle softly the same refrain as before. From his pocket he produces a cigarette, which he places in his mouth. He is preparing to light it when a thought strikes him. He goes quickly over to the phonograph and, bending down, takes a record and examines it. It has become so dark that he is unable to read the title; so he lights the neighboring gas jet. He then examines two or three records in quick succession, finally producing one which causes a smile to spread over his face.*]

MIX. Ah!

[*He places his find on the phonograph, winds the machine, and starts his record playing. The tune is the same one he has been whistling the whole afternoon. With an expression of great pleasure he hears the record start, at the same time producing a huge nickel watch from his pocket and glancing at it casually. As he sees the time, his whole expression changes.*]

MIX [*throwing his cigarette impatiently on the floor*]. Hell!

[*He stops the phonograph and tilts back the playing arm. He buttons up his overcoat, turns up his collar and adjusts his hat. Then, his whistle suddenly breaking out again loudly into his favorite refrain, he marches quickly across the room to the door at the back, and goes out. He is seen to pass by the window, and his whistling is heard to die away gradually down the street.*

Stillness has hardly fallen when the door at the back opens, and Mrs. Madden enters. She appears a trifle chilly, but seems otherwise to have recovered her composure. Closing the door behind her, she comes forward lazily to the table. She looks down at the piles of bills before her with a perfectly vacant stare, and taking from her pocket a pound box of candy she tosses it down on the papers. She opens the cover and extracts a large chocolate cream, which she eats indolently and with evident pleasure. Next, she removes her hat and coat, throwing them carelessly on the table beside the candy. She walks, with a lazy, flat-footed step, over to the gas jet at the right, and turns up the gas sufficiently for reading. Looking down, she notices the record left on the phonograph.]

MRS. MADDEN [*with slow pleasure*]. Hm!

[*Without bothering to find out*

whether or not the phonograph is wound up, she starts it going and places the playing arm with apparent carelessness so that the record begins playing about a third of the way through. She listens to the music for three or four seconds with an expression of indolent appreciation, then she crosses the floor to the door at the left, always moving with the same flat-footed walk. Opening the door, she peers through it.]

MRS. MADDEN [*calling, her flat voice rising above the sound of the phonograph*]. Oh Ji — im!

[*She listens a moment for an answer; but as there is none, she closes the door and turns around. Once again the music catches and holds her attention. She listens for an instant and then goes back to the table, making a heavy attempt at a dance step or two. From the pocket of her overcoat she extracts a new cheap novel, whose content is well advertised by a lurid colored cover. This she takes over to the morris chair. Another thought strikes her; she tosses the novel into the chair and goes back to the table, where she gets five or six chocolate creams from the candy box, depositing them in a row on the right arm of the morris chair. Then she takes up her book and sits down. For a moment she tries to read, but all is not comfortable yet. She changes her position two or three times in the chair. At last she rises, heaving a disgusted sigh. Dropping her book into the chair she walks with flat, heavy steps across the room and out of the door at the left, leaving it open. She returns almost instantly, dragging two greasy looking sofa pillows after her. She kicks the door to, and crosses to the morris chair. Here she places one of the pillows on the ground for her feet, the other at the back of the chair. Picking up her book once more, she settles back into the chair with an expression of perfect animal contentment. She puts another chocolate cream in her mouth, and finds her place in the book. Then the music again engages her attention; she leans back with a foolish smile on her face as she listens. Constantly chewing the piece of candy, she hums a bar or two of the tune which is still being played by the phonograph. Then she settles down to her reading, eating candy as she feels inclined. The phonograph reaches the end of the record and makes that annoying clicking noise which shows it should be shut off. For two or three seconds Mrs. Madden pays no attention to it. Finally she raises herself in the chair, and without getting up she reaches over and switches off the phonograph, then settles back again to her reading.*

Some one goes swiftly by the window outside. After a moment the door at the back opens, and Madden stands in the doorway.]

MADDEN [*in the doorway, catching sight of Mrs. Madden. With pathetic eagerness*]. *Florrie!* [*He closes the door.*]

MRS. MADDEN [*without looking up. In lazy, matter of fact tones*]. 'Lo, Jim.

MADDEN [*coming forward toward his wife*]. Are you *really* safe, Florrie?

[*She looks up with a glance of feeble annoyance.*]

MRS. MADDEN. Sure. I'm all right. [*She looks down again.*]

MADDEN [*coming still closer*]. Oh, I'm so *thankful!* . . . I . . . I been lookin' for you, Florrie.— Where you been?

MRS. MADDEN [*without looking up*]. W'at d' y' say?

MADDEN. Where you been, Florrie? [*With even greater anxiety.*] You didn't go down by the river?

MRS. MADDEN [*looking up*]. Lord no! W'atev'r made y' think that? [*She takes up a chocolate cream and bites off half of it.*] I jus' took Mrs. Montanio over t' Brailey's new place f'r a couple o' ice cream sodas. [*She looks down again.*]

MADDEN [*softly*]. Oh. [*A shadow passes over his face and vanishes.*] Florrie. [*He sits down on the left arm of the morris chair and puts his arm*

affectionately about her shoulders.] I didn't know what I was sayin'.

MRS. MADDEN [*puzzled. Without looking up*]. W'at y' talkin' 'bout?

MADDEN [*pathetically*]. I guess I ought not to ask you to forgive me.

MRS. MADDEN [*looking up*]. F'give y'? [*Remembering.*] Oh, yes — y' *did* call me some darn hard names.

MADDEN. I know. [*Slowly. Looking into her face.*] D' you think you *could* forgive me?

MRS. MADDEN [*lazzily*]. Sure. I guess so. Glad t' see y' got over yer pet.

[*He smiles a pathetic, eager smile, and takes her left hand, which is lying in her lap. With an impatient movement, she stretches her left arm out and back, carrying his left hand with it and forcing him off the arm of the chair.*]

MRS. MADDEN. Say, Jim — look w'at's on th' table.

[*Madden sighs softly and takes a few steps toward the table. He sees the candy box; a darker shadow appears on his face for a second or two, and is gone.*]

MRS. MADDEN. Have a chocklick, Jim.

[*She herself picks one up from the arm of the chair; then she looks down again at her book, eating the candy as she reads.*]

MADDEN [*unheeding.—Taking a step or two back toward her from the table. With deep feeling*]. Florrie. I got somethin' I want to tell you. [*She does not look up. He takes another step toward her.*] After you'd gone out, I kept thinkin' . . . thinkin' what mighta happened to you.

MRS. MADDEN [*with a short chuckle*]. Y' poor boob!

MADDEN. Florrie — look at me. [*She looks up with an expression of lazy annoyance.*] Out there — [*He gestures toward the door*] the river looked so cold an' black — An' I couldn't find you — . . . I knew all of a sudden I . . . I hadn't really meant what I said to you.

MRS. MADDEN [*impatiently*]. That's all right. [*She looks down again at her book.*]

MADDEN [*with increasing emotion. Going to the arm chair and looking down at her tenderly from behind it*]. I kept thinkin' . . . thinkin' how pretty an' how . . . how good natured you are. [*With some embarrassment.*] I thought how we used to walk . . . down by the river. Four years ago . . . you know — just before we was married.

MRS. MADDEN [*with growing annoyance*]. Don' choo want 'nuther choclick, Jim?

MADDEN [*unheeding*]. Florrie — d'you remember that time . . . the first time you let me hold your hand?

MRS. MADDEN [*looking up impatiently*]. W'at's bitin' you? Don't y' see I'm readin'? [*He steps back and to the left a pace or two. She looks down again.*]

MADDEN [*humbly*]. Scuse me, Florrie. I just wanted to tell you. [*With great earnestness.*] You know, I'd forgotten . . . I mean I didn't rearlize . . . till just now — [*Awkwardly.*] how fond . . . how much I . . . I love you.

MRS. MADDEN [*thickly, through a chocolate cream which she is eating. Without looking up.*] Tha's . . . nice.

[*He looks at her pathetically, waiting, hoping that she will look up. His face is intense with longing. After a short interval he gives it up. He turns sadly and goes toward the door at the left, passing in back of the table.*]

MRS. MADDEN [*taking another chocolate and looking after him. He has almost reached the door*]. Jim. [*He stops and turns eagerly.*] You ain't such a bad ol' boy. [*His face is suddenly radiant. He takes several steps back toward her, bringing him behind the table. She has looked down at her book again. Coaxingly.*] Goin' t' take me t' Horseman's t'night f'r lobster?

[*All the eagerness, the radiance, vanishes from his face.—He sits down heavily in the chair behind the table. He looks at her, uncomprehending, hurt, disillusionized.*]

MRS. MADDEN [*without looking up*]. An' say — [*She puts another chocolate in her mouth. Speaking through it thickly.*] I'm jus' *dyin'* t' see a real . . . comical . . . show.

[*Madden's head droops. He looks at his wife dumbly, then back at the table. His left hand goes out toward the bills; then he drops both*

elbows limply on the table, resting his weight on them. Mrs. Madden does not look up, but continues to read and munch a chocolate cream.

Madden stares in front of him miserably, hopelessly as

The Curtain Falls.]

MANSIONS

A Play

By Hildegarde Flanner

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CHARACTERS

HARRIET WILDE.
LYDIA WILDE [*her niece*].
JOE WILDE [*her nephew*].

TIME: *Yesterday.*

MANSIONS is an original play. The editors are indebted to Mr. Sam Hume for permission to include it in this volume. Applications for permission to produce this play must be made to Frank Shay, care Stewart & Kidd Company, Cincinnati, Ohio.

MANSIONS

A Play

By Hildegarde Flanner

[*In a small town on the southern border of a Middle-Western state, stands an old brick house. The town is sufficiently near the Mason and Dixon line to gather about its ankles the rustle of ancient petticoats of family pride and to step softly lest the delicate sounds should be lost in a too noisy world. Even this old brick house seems reticent of the present, and gazing aloofly from its arched windows, barely suffers the main street to run past its gate. Many of the blinds are drawn, as if the dwelling and its inhabitants preferred to hug to themselves the old strength of the past rather than to admit the untried things of the present.*

The scene of the play is laid in the living-room. At the back is a wide door leading into the hallway beyond. At the left are French doors opening upon steps which might descend into the garden. At the right side of the room, and opposite the French doors, is a marble fireplace, while on either side of the fireplace and a little distant from it, is a tall window. To the left of the main door is a lounge upholstered in dark flowered tapestry, and to the right of the door is a mahogany secretary. Before the secretary and away from the hearth, an old-fashioned grand piano is placed diagonally, so that any one seated at the instrument would be partially facing the audience. To the left of the French doors is a lyre table, on which stands a bowl of flowers. Above the rear door hangs the portrait of a man.

When the curtain rises Harriet Wilde is discovered standing precisely in the middle of her great-grandfather's carpet which is precisely in the middle of the floor. To Harriet, ancestors are a passion, the future an imposition. Added to this, she is in her way, intelligent. Therefore even before she speaks, you who are observant know that she is a formidable person. Her voice is low, even, and — what is the adjective? Christian. Yes, Harriet is a good woman. But don't let that mislead you.]

Harriet [*calling*]. Lydia!

[*Lydia comes into the room from the garden. In fact, she has been coming and going for more than fifteen years at the word of her aunt, although she is now twenty-seven. Her hands appear sensitive and in some way, deprived and restless. She is dressed in a slim black gown which could be worn gracefully by no one else, although Lydia is not aware of this fact. In one hand she carries a pair of garden shears with handles painted scarlet; in the other, a bright spray of portulaca; while over her wrist is slung a garden hat. During their conversation Lydia moves fitfully about the room. Her manner changes from bitter drollery to a lonely timidness and from timidness to something akin to sulkiness. Harriet, whether seated or standing, gives the impression of having been for a long hour with dignity in the same position. She has no sympathy for Lydia nor any understanding of her. There is a wall of mistrust between the two. Both stoop to pick up stones, not to throw, but to build the wall even higher. Lydia employs by turns an attitude of cheerful cynicism and one of indifference, both planned to annoy her aunt, though without real malice. But this has become a habit.*]

Harriet. What are you doing, Lydia?

Lydia. I had been trimming the rose

hedge along the south garden, Aunt Harriet.

HARRIET. But surely you can find something better to do than that, my dear. [*She cannot help calling people "my dear." It is because she is so superior.*] Some one might see in if you trim it too much. We want a bit of privacy in these inquisitive times.

LYDIA. The young plants on the edge of the walk needed sun.

HARRIET. Move the young plants. Don't sacrifice the rose hedge. [*Pausing as she straightens the candle in an old brass candlestick on the mantel.*] I — it seems to me that the furniture has been disarranged.

LYDIA. I was changing it a little this morning.

HARRIET. May I ask why?

LYDIA [*eagerly*]. Oh, just — just to be changing. Don't you think it is an improvement?

HARRIET [*coldly*]. It does very well. But I prefer it as it was. You know yourself that this room has never been changed since your grandfather died. [*Piously.*] And as long as I am mistress in this house, it shall remain exactly as he liked it.

[*Lydia looks spitefully at the portrait over the rear door.*]

HARRIET [*stepping to the window to the left of the fire-place and lowering the curtain to the middle of the frame.*] The court house will be done before your brother is well enough to come downstairs, Lydia. How astonished he will be to see it completed.

LYDIA. Yes. But he would much rather watch while it is being done.

HARRIET. Well naturally. But from upstairs you can't see through the leaves of the maple tree. Why, Lydia, there isn't another tree for miles around with such marvelous foliage. Great-grandfather Wilde did not know, when he set out a sapling, that the county court house was to be built — almost in its very shadow.

LYDIA. You always did admire any kind of a family tree.

HARRIET [*as if speaking to an unruly child*]. If Great-grandfather Wilde heard you say that —

LYDIA [*with a sudden flash of spirit which dies almost before she ceases to speak*]. If Great-grandfather Wilde heard me say that. It may be he would have the excellent sense to come back and chop off a limb or two, so that Joe could have sunlight in that little dark room up there, and see out.

HARRIET [*lifting her left hand and letting it sink upon her knee with the air of one who has suffered much, but can suffer more*]. Lydia, my dear child, I am not responsible for your disposition this lovely morning. Moreover, this is a fruitless —

LYDIA. Fruitless, fruitless! *Why* couldn't he have planted an apple tree? [*Throwing her head back slightly.*] With blossoms in the spring and fruit in the summer —

HARRIET. I beg your pardon?

LYDIA [*wearily*]. With blossoms in the spring and fruit in the summer. [*Slowly and gazing toward the window.*] Sounds rather pretty, doesn't it?

HARRIET [*unsympathetically*]. I do not understand what you are talking about.

LYDIA [*shortly*]. No.

HARRIET. It is always a source of sorrow to me, Lydia, that you show so little pride in any of the really noble men in the Wilde family.

LYDIA. I never knew them.

HARRIET. But you could at least reverence what I tell you.

LYDIA [*cheerfully*]. Well, I do think great-great-grandfather must have been a gay old person.

HARRIET. Gay old person!

LYDIA. Yes. The portulaca blooms so brightly on his grave. It's really not bad, having your family buried in the front yard, if its dust inspires a flower like this.

HARRIET. I don't see why you insist upon picking those. They wilt immediately.

LYDIA [*looking appealingly at her aunt*]. Oh, but they're so bright and gay! I can't keep my hands from them.

HARRIET [*scornfully smoothing her lace cuff*]. Really?

LYDIA [*for the moment a trifle lonely*]. Aunt Harriet, tell me why these dead old men mean so much to you?

HARRIET [*breathlessly*]. Dead — old

— men —? Why, Lydia? The Wildes came up from Virginia and were among the very first pioneers, in this section. They practically made this town and there is no better known name here in the southern part of the state than ours. We —

LYDIA. Oh, yes. Of course, I've heard all that ever since I can remember. [*Assuming an attitude of pride.*] We have the oldest and most aristocratic-looking house for miles around; the rose-hedge has bloomed for fifty years — it's very nearly dead, too; General Someone drank out of our well, or General Some-One-Else drowned in it, I always forget which.

HARRIET. Lydia!

LYDIA [*soothingly*]. Oh, it doesn't make much difference which. That doesn't worry me. But what does, is how you manage to put a halo around all your fathers and grandfathers and —

HARRIET [*piously*]. Because they represent the noble traditions of a noble past.

LYDIA. What about the noble present?

HARRIET [*looking vaguely about the room*]. I have not seen it.

LYDIA [*bitterly*]. No, you have not seen it. [*Turning to go.*]

HARRIET. Just one moment, Lydia. I want to speak to you about your brother.

LYDIA [*quickly*]. Did the doctor say that Joe is worse?

HARRIET. No. In fact, the doctor won't tell me anything. He and Joe seem to have a secret. I can get nothing definite from the doctor at all. But what I feel it my duty to ask you, Lydia, is this: Tell me truthfully. Have you been speaking to Joe about — Heaven?

LYDIA. No. What a dreadful thing to even mention to a sick boy.

HARRIET. My dear, you are quite wrong. But some one has been misinforming him.

LYDIA. Really?

HARRIET. Lydia, I am very distressed. [*Slowly.*] Your young brother holds the most unusual and sacrilegious ideas of immortality.

LYDIA [*indifferently*]. So?

HARRIET. No member of the Wilde family has ever held such ideas. It is quite irregular.

LYDIA. What does he think?

HARRIET. I don't know that I can tell you clearly. It is all so distasteful to me. But he declares — even in contradiction to my explanation — that after death we continue our earthly occupations,— that is, our studies, our ambitions —

LYDIA. That is a wonderful idea.

HARRIET [*not noticing*]. That if we die before accomplishing anything on earth, we have a chance in the after-life to work. Work! Imagine! In fact he pictures Heaven as a place where people are — doing things.

LYDIA [*lifting her head and smiling*]. Oh, that is beautiful — I mean, what did you tell him?

HARRIET [*reverently*]. I explained very carefully that Heaven is peace, peace. That the first thing we do when a dear one dies, is to pray for the eternal rest of his soul.

LYDIA [*dully*]. Oh.

HARRIET. Yes, Lydia, I am glad to see that you share my distress. Why — he desecrates the conception of Heaven with workmen, artists, inventors, musicians — anything but angels.

LYDIA. Anything but angels. [*Smiles.*] That is quite new, is it not? At least in this little town. Does Joe see himself building houses in Heaven?

HARRIET. That is the worst of it. Why, Lydia, even after I told him patiently that there were no such things as architects in Heaven, he still insists that if he dies, he is going to be one.

LYDIA [*startled*]. If he should die?

HARRIET [*decidedly*]. That is simply another foolish fancy. He has been confined so long, that he gets restless and imagines these strange things.

LYDIA. Poor Joe.

HARRIET. Don't sympathize with him, please. I can't possibly allow him to become an architect.

LYDIA. Why not?

HARRIET. When the men in our family have been clergymen for four generations?

LYDIA. Yes, but they're dead now.

HARRIET. All the more reason for continuing the tradition.

LYDIA. There isn't one bit of money in it.

HARRIET [*proudly*]. When was a Wilde ever slave to money?

LYDIA [*sulkily*]. Certainly not since my day, and for a very, very good reason.

HARRIET. Well, at least we have sufficient to send Joe to college — and as a divinity student. And some day we will hear him preach in the house of the Lord.

LYDIA. He would rather build houses himself.

HARRIET. Simply a boyish whim. He's too young to really have a mind of his own. [*Confidently.*] He will do what I tell him to.

LYDIA. He is very nearly nineteen, Aunt Harriet. Didn't you have a mind of your own when you were nineteen?

HARRIET. Certainly not. Yes, of course.

[*Lydia laughs.*]

HARRIET [*the hem of her skirt bellowing with dignity.*] This is entirely different. If you can't be polite, Lydia, you might at least stop laughing.

LYDIA [*still laughing*]. Oh, no — oh, no — I take after my great-great-grandfather. I've just discovered it. At last I'm interested in the noble men of the Wilde family. I know he liked to laugh. Look at the pertness of that! [*Holding up the portulaca.*]

HARRIET [*ignoring the flower*]. Please give me your sun-hat, Lydia.

LYDIA [*demurely*]. Oh, are you going to look at the portulaca?

HARRIET. No. I am going to see what you have done to the rose-hedge. [*Going out through the French door.*]

LYDIA [*suddenly furious*]. Go look at your decrepit old rose-hedge! Go look at it! And I hope you get hurt on a thorn and bleed, yes, bleed — the way you make me bleed. I did cut a hole in it. I don't care who sees in — I want to see out! [*Looking toward the portrait and throwing the flowers on the floor.*] Take your stupid flowers — take them. They don't do me any good. They're withering, they're withering!

[*She goes to lean against the window and look toward the court house. As she stands there, the door opens slowly and Joe, with blankets wrapped about him and trailing from his shoulders, comes unsteadily into the room. He carries paper and drawing materials. He is an eager boy, who seems always afraid of being overtaken. Lydia turns suddenly and starts toward the door. She stops in surprise as she sees her brother.*]

LYDIA. Joe! My goodness! Whatever made you come downstairs? Aunt Harriet will be angry. Why this might be awfully dangerous for you, Joe. How did you come to do such a thing?

[*She helps him toward the lounge and arranges a cushion for him.*]

JOE [*sinking back, but facing the window*]. I wanted to see how the court house was getting on. I can't see out of my window, you know.

LYDIA. Well, you see [*Raising the blind.*] they will soon have it done.

JOE [*delightedly*]. Yes, won't they, though. Look at those white pillars! That's worth something, I tell you. I'm glad I saw it.

LYDIA. What do you mean?

JOE. Just what I said.

LYDIA. Yes, but, Joe — coming down stairs this way, when you have been really ill —

JOE. Oh, don't argue, Lydia. I have just been arguing with Aunt Harriet.

LYDIA. You'd better rest then. You will have to, anyway, before you go back to your room. I see you plan to draw.

JOE. Yes, I've been lazy for so long. It's driving me crazy, never doing anything. I thought I'd copy some Greek columns this morning. Could you give me a large book to work on?

LYDIA. I'll look for one. [*Hunting.*] Joe, what were you and Aunt Harriet arguing about?

JOE. Oh, nothing.

LYDIA. Yes, I've heard her do that before. But won't you tell me?

JOE. It wasn't anything, Lydia.

LYDIA. Here is what you want.

[*She brings a large bound volume from the piano and places it upon his knees.*]

JOE. Thank you. [*Settling himself to draw.*] Where is she, by the way?

LYDIA. Out looking at the rose-hedge, where I cut a hole in it.

JOE. A hole in the sacred rose-hedge! Where did you suddenly get the courage? I've heard you talk about doing such things before, but you never really did them.

LYDIA [*timidly*]. I don't know, Joe, where I got my courage. I think it's leaving me, too.

[*She puts out her hand as if trying to detain some one.*]

JOE [*cheerfully*]. Come stand by me. I have — I have a great deal of courage this morning.

[*Lydia stands behind Joe and looks over his shoulder.*]

JOE [*turning to her affectionately*]. It's good I have you, Lydia. Aunt Harriet has a fit every time she sees me doing this.

LYDIA. Having them is part of her religion.

JOE. Well, this is mine. What is yours, Lydia? I don't believe I ever heard you say.

LYDIA [*shortly*]. I haven't any.

JOE. Sure enough?

LYDIA [*nodding, then speaking quite slowly*]. I never did anything for any one out of love, and I was never allowed to do anything I wanted to for joy. So I know that I have no religion.

JOE [*embarrassed*]. Never mind. Perhaps that will all come to you some day. [*Joe suddenly sits erect and looks first toward the French door and then toward the window.*] I wonder what you will do when I go?

LYDIA [*following the direction of his gaze*]. Where?

JOE. Oh — to college.

LYDIA. Perhaps when you go to college I'll do something Aunt Harriet doesn't think is regular.

JOE. What will it be?

LYDIA. How can I know now? How should I want to know?

[*Joe looks over his shoulder toward the rear door of the room.*]

LYDIA [*nervously*]. What do you see?

JOE. Nothing — nothing.

LYDIA. Then please stop looking at it.

JOE [*meeting her eyes for the fraction of a moment and then holding up the sheet of paper.*] I am actually getting some form into this column. If I could only learn to design beautiful buildings —

[*He puts his hand to his side in sudden pain.*]

LYDIA [*not noting his action*]. Why, of course you will some day.

JOE. I don't know. Sometimes I'm afraid I won't get the chance.

LYDIA. Oh, you'll be a man. You can ride over Aunt Harriet.

[*Joe looks at his copy and crumples it savagely. Suddenly he holds up his hand and listens.*]

JOE. What was that bell?

LYDIA. I did not hear any.

JOE. I did.

LYDIA. It must have been the side door. Some one will answer it.

JOE. Do people often come by the side door?

LYDIA. Why, Joe, you know very well that the delivery boy always comes there.

JOE. Delivery? — I wonder — will it be delivery?

LYDIA. Joe, you're even odder than I am. Stop it. It doesn't do to have two in the family.

JOE [*laughing*]. Oh, just as you say. [*Looking at the book on his knee.*] What is this big book?

LYDIA. Music.

JOE [*opening the book*]. Why, it has your name in it.

LYDIA. It is my book.

JOE [*in surprise*]. Did you ever play the piano?

LYDIA [*turning aside*]. Yes.

JOE [*his face lighting up*]. Play something now, *please*.

LYDIA. That piano has been locked for fifteen years.

JOE. Ever since mother died and you and I came here to live?

LYDIA. Yes. Haven't you ever wondered why it was never open?

JOE. I certainly have. But Aunt Harriet always avoided the subject and I could never get you to say anything about it.

LYDIA. By the time I had tried it for two years, I knew better.

JOE. But why is it locked?

LYDIA. Because I neglected my duties. I played the piano when I should have been studying, and I played when I should have been hemming linen, and I played when I should have been learning psalms.

JOE. But surely when you grew older — when you were through school —

LYDIA. No. I lied to her once about it. She made me promise not to touch

the piano, and left it open on purpose to see what I would do. And I played and she heard me. So when I denied it — [*Shrugging her shoulders.*] You see, after that, to have let me go on, playing and undisciplined — why, it would have meant the loss of my soul. [*Very pleasantly.*] It would have meant hell, at least, Joe dear, and I don't know what else. Aunt Harriet has always been so careful about what I learned.

JOE [*angrily*]. But surely you are old enough now to do what you want to! I'll ask her myself if —

LYDIA [*alarmed*]. Oh, no, Joe! Please, please don't do that. I should be frightened, really. It is a matter of religion with her.

JOE. And don't you know how to play any longer?

LYDIA. Yes, some. I sneak into the church when no one is there and play on that piano. [*She walks to the instrument, and sitting down before it, rubs her palms lovingly across the closed lid.*] When you were away six months ago, this was opened to be tuned for those young cousins of hers who visited. They were lively young girls, and the first thing they did every morning was to go to the piano. They would have asked questions if it had been locked, and Aunt Harriet hates inquisitiveness like poison.

JOE. Where is the key?

LYDIA. I don't know where it is now. She has probably thrown it away. It would be just like her to do it. [*Changing her manner suddenly and rising.*] Joe, wouldn't you like a cup of tea?

JOE [*earnestly*]. No, I wouldn't. Sit down, Lydia.

[*Lydia sits down again. Joe starts to speak, but stops to look about the room.*]

LYDIA. Joe, what *are* you looking for?

JOE [*slowly and reluctantly*]. I can't get over the feeling that I am expecting some one.

LYDIA. Who is it?

JOE [*evasively*]. I don't know. Some one I never saw before.

LYDIA [*laughing*]. An unknown visitor knocks before he comes in the door.

JOE. I'm not sure that this one will.

[*He closes his eyes wearily and puts his palms before them.*]

LYDIA [*gently*]. Joe, you're tired. Please go upstairs.

JOE. Not quite yet. [*Eagerly.*] Lydia, you know what Aunt Harriet and I were arguing about. I saw it in your eyes.

LYDIA. Of course. It's a beautiful idea.

JOE [*excitedly*]. Then you think I'm right.

LYDIA [*looking at the piano*]. I hope to Heaven you are.

JOE [*pleading*]. Then do something for me, Lydia, please.

LYDIA. What?

JOE. I've been so worried lately to think — how awful it is if a person dies without accomplishing anything.

LYDIA. I wish you wouldn't talk like that.

JOE [*hastily*]. I wasn't speaking for myself. I meant, just generally, you know. But what I have been figuring out, is this — so long as you believe that you can go on working after you leave here, it's all right, isn't it?

LYDIA [*hesitant*]. Yes.

JOE [*thoughtfully and as though on unaccustomed ground*]. But when you first go over, you are rather weak —

LYDIA. You mean your soul?

JOE [*speaking hurriedly*]. Yes, that's it. And you mustn't be worried by grief or any force working against you from the people you've left behind.

LYDIA. Yes, I follow you. Where did you learn all this?

JOE. In a book at the library.

LYDIA [*uncertainly*]. I think I have heard of some theory —

JOE [*impatiently*]. I'm not bothering about theories. I haven't got time for them. In fact, I'd almost forgotten about the whole idea until the other day. Something the doctor told me set me thinking. He is really a splendid man, Lydia.

LYDIA [*indifferently*]. Yes, I've always thought so. But what is it you want me to do for you, Joe? Aunt Harriet may come in any moment.

JOE [*looking at Lydia very fixedly and speaking slowly*]. Just this. When I die, don't let Aunt Harriet pray for my soul.

LYDIA. Joe!

JOE. Yes, I mean it. She has a powerful mind. And she would pray for my

eternal rest and I might not be strong enough to stand against her.

LYDIA [*starting toward the rear door*]. I won't listen to you any longer. It is wrong to talk and think about death.

JOE. Lydia, please! It means so much to me. Listen just one second. I know I'm not very good, but Aunt Harriet would be sure to try to make an angel out of me. And if I thought I had to sit on those everlasting gold steps and twang an everlasting gold harp forever and forever — Lydia, I'd go crazy, I'd go crazy!

[*His voice rises to a scream and he sinks back gasping.*]

LYDIA [*rushing to his side*]. I promise anything. Only don't excite yourself this way. For Heaven's sake, Joe, be quiet.

JOE [*insisting*]. But don't let her pray. And make her give you the key to the piano, and you play something so I can go out in harmony.— Harmony — do you understand that, Lydia? Harmony. That's the word they used so often in the book. Do you promise surely?

LYDIA [*tearfully*]. Yes, but, Joe, you're not going to die. You're not! The doctor would have told us something about it.

JOE. Of course, I'm not going to. Not until I get good and ready. Don't be silly. But remember, when it does happen, you must not cry. That is very hard on souls that are just starting out.

LYDIA. I — I can see how it might be.

JOE. You won't forget to smile?

LYDIA. No.

JOE. But smile now, for practice.

LYDIA [*trying to smile, but failing*]. Oh, I can smile for you easily enough; but don't frighten me like that again.

JOE. I'll try not to.

LYDIA [*suddenly facing him*]. Do you expect Aunt Harriet to live as long as you do?

JOE [*with a second's hesitation*]. Yes, I'm quite sure she will. The Wildes have the habit of living long, you know.

LYDIA. But why shouldn't you live longer than she, since you are younger?

JOE. Oh, I don't know. I'd rather like to get ahead of her in something, though.

LYDIA. Well, you do believe in preparation. I can't see why you are being so beforehanded, but if it gives you any pleasure to scare me to death —

JOE. It certainly does, Lydia. And just one thing more, I want of you.

LYDIA. What?

JOE [*rather shyly*]. Take the Bible and read something to bind the promise. Just any verse.

LYDIA. This is becoming too solemn. I don't care for it.

[*She approaches the lyre table, upon which, of course, is a Bible, and opens the book.*]

JOE. Then I'll be ready to go.

LYDIA [*looking at him sharply*]. Go?

JOE. Upstairs.

[*Lydia turns the leaves of the Bible.*]

JOE. This will be our secret, Lydia. [*He leans forward and looks out the French door, then turns to her impatiently.*] What are you waiting for?

LYDIA. Yes, Joe, our secret. Let me see. Mother was always very fond of John. [*Joe makes a movement of pain, which Lydia does not see.*] Oh, I have the very thing to read you. How strange! I sounds like a prophecy for you.

JOE. Read it. [*Steps are heard in the garden. Joe looks up in alarm.*] Who is that coming?

LYDIA. Only Aunt Harriet.

[*Harriet Wilde comes in through the French door.*]

HARRIET. I managed, Lydia, to some extent, to repair the damage which you — [*Seeing Joe, she stops in surprise.*] Actually, Joe downstairs! But I felt certain this morning, my dear, when you were arguing in that unheard-of fashion, that you must be better.

LYDIA [*hastily*]. I don't think it has hurt him to come down, Aunt Harriet.

HARRIET. On the contrary, I think it has done him good.

JOE. I should say it did, Aunt Harriet, — you don't know how much. [*Again he looks toward the rear door.*]

HARRIET. What is it, Joe dear? Is the doctor coming again?

JOE. No, I hardly think the doctor will need to come again.

HARRIET. Why, how gratifying. I am so glad.

[*Joe closes his eyes wearily.*]

LYDIA. Aunt Harriet, Joe was just

about to go up to his room, but he asked me to read something to him from the Bible first. I opened to this passage. Won't you read it to him?

HARRIET. Yes, I will indeed. It gives me great happiness, Joe, to see you really showing a desire for the holy word of the Scripture.

[*Harriet takes the Bible from Lydia and stands in the light by the French door. She faces slightly away from Joe. Lydia walks to the rear door and stands directly beneath the portrait. She conceals a smile and looks expectantly toward her aunt.*

[*Reading*]: Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I —

JOE [*sitting erect and interrupting*]. Many mansions — many mansions — Lydia, Aunt Harriet — who said I couldn't build hou — houses — in —

[*He sinks back. Harriet does not look at him, but shuts the Bible with displeasure and moves forward to place it on the table.*]

HARRIET [*coldly*]. That is positive sacrilege, Joe.

[*Lydia laughs triumphantly and steps to Joe's side, walking on her tip-toes and pretending to dance, pleased at her aunt's discomfiture.*]

LYDIA [*stopping by Joe and bending over him*]. Didn't I say it was a prophecy?

[*Joe does not answer nor open his eyes. Lydia takes his hand and then drops it in fear.*]

LYDIA. Aunt Harriet, come here quickly!

[*Harriet comes swiftly and stoops over Joe. She feels of his pulse and lays her hand against his heart.*]

HARRIET. Joe, Joe!

LYDIA [*moving distractedly toward the door*]. I'll call the doctor.

HARRIET [*standing very straight and twisting her handkerchief*]. It will do no good, Lydia. Joe has gone. This is the way your father went and your grandfather — all the men in the Wilde family. But this is irregular. They never died so young.

[*Lydia covers her face with her hands.*]

HARRIET. And he seems so well. Why didn't the doctor — Lydia! This was their secret — this is what they wouldn't tell me!

LYDIA. Secret? Which secret?

[*She looks at Joe and clasps her hands in anguish. Harriet kneels by the lounge and begins to pray.*]

HARRIET. Dear Lord, I do beseech thee to grant peace and eternal rest to thy child come home to thee. Grant that he may forever sit in thy presence —

[*Lydia, slowly realizing what her aunt is saying, runs to her side and makes her rise.*]

LYDIA. Stop that! Stop it, I say! You worried him enough when he was alive. Now that he's dead, let him do what he wants to.

HARRIET. Lydia! You have lost your senses. Be calm, be calm. [*Harriet crosses to the table and picks up the Bible.*] Come. We will read a few verses and have faith that —

LYDIA [*snatching the Bible from her aunt*]. No you shan't! Let him alone. Oh, Joe, Joe, I'm trying. Be brave! You knew, all along. You were watching, you were expecting. Why didn't you tell me? [*Lydia looks from Joe to the piano and back to Joe. She composes herself and puts her hands on her aunt's shoulders.*] Where is the key to the piano?

HARRIET [*horrified*]. You wouldn't touch the piano in the presence of death!

LYDIA. Where is the key?

HARRIET [*unable to fathom Lydia's strange demand*]. It is gone. I don't know where it is.

LYDIA. Don't you? Don't you? [*Sliding her hands toward her aunt's throat and turning toward Joe.*] Be brave, Joe. [*Speaking to her aunt.*] Then if the key is gone, I shall have to take the fire-tongs.

[*Lydia steps toward the fire-place.*]

HARRIET. Lydia! Don't touch them! What are you about?

LYDIA [*coming again to her aunt and placing her hands on her shoulders*]. I

want — that — key. And I want it quickly.

[*They look squarely into one another's eyes.*]

HARRIET [*uncertainly*] I can't give it to you now. I will never give it to you.

LYDIA. No? .[*Almost breaking down.*] Joe, why didn't you tell me? [*Walking toward the hearth.*] Very well, Aunt Harriet.

HARRIET [*passing her hand over her eyes in terror*]. Wait! Look in that old vase on the mantel. No — the one that we never use — with the crack in it —

[*Lydia takes down the vase and tilts it. A key falls on the hearth with a ringing sound. She picks it up and quickly opens the piano.*]

HARRIET. To think that this should happen in my house. Lord, what have I done to deserve it?

LYDIA [*seating herself at the piano*]. Joe, this sounds like wind blowing through willow trees. [*She plays softly.*] Good-by, Joe, good-by, dear. Good luck!

HARRIET [*pulling down the blinds on either side of the fire-place*]. Lydia, have you no religion?

LYDIA [*controlling her agitation*]. Yes — I have.

HARRIET [*looking from Lydia to Joe*]. I can't understand. Joe, poor Joe.

LYDIA. Let not your heart be troubled. . . [*Continuing to play.*] I'm smiling, Joe. I'm laughing, Joe! Be strong. . . .

[*Harriet is stupefied. She starts toward Lydia, but stops. She lifts the Bible from the table, but replaces it hastily, as Lydia looks across at her.*]

LYDIA [*dreamily*]. In my Father's house are many mansions.

[*Harriet looks to the portrait above the door, as if for help.*]

LYDIA. If it were not so — I would have told you —

[*And Lydia looks mystically out into space and continues to play while*

The Curtain Falls.]

TRIFLES

A Play

By Susan Glaspell

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TRIFLES was first produced by the Provincetown Players, at the Wharf Theatre, Provincetown, Mass., on August 8th, 1916, with the following cast:

GEORGE HENDERSON.....*Robert Rogers.*
HENRY PETERS.....*Robert Conville.*
LEWIS HALE.....*George Cram Cook.*
MRS. PETERS.....*Alice Hall.*
MRS. HALE.....*Susan Glaspell.*

It was later produced by the Washington Square Players at the Comedy Theatre, New York City, on the night of November 15th, 1916, with the following cast:

GEORGE HENDERSON.....*T. W. Gibson.*
HENRY PETERS.....*Arthur E. Hohl.*
LEWIS HALE.....*John King.*
MRS. PETERS.....*Marjorie Vonnegut.*
MRS. HALE.....*Elinor M. Cox.*

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TRIFLES

A Play

By Susan Glaspell

[Scene: *The kitchen in the now abandoned farm-house of John Wright, a gloomy kitchen, and left without having been put in order — unwashed pans under the sink, a loaf of bread outside the bread-box, a dish-towel on the table — other signs of incompleted work. At the rear the outer door opens and the Sheriff comes in followed by the County Attorney and Hale. The Sheriff and Hale are men in middle life, the County Attorney is a young man; all are much bundled up and go at once to the stove. They are followed by the two women — the Sheriff's wife first; she is a slight wiry woman, a thin nervous face. Mrs. Hale is larger and would ordinarily be called more comfortable looking, but she is disturbed now and looks fearfully about as she enters. The women have come in slowly, and stand close together near the door.*]

County Attorney [*rubbing his hands*]. This feels good. Come up to the fire, ladies.

Mrs. Peters [*after taking a step forward*]. I'm not — cold.

Sheriff [*unbuttoning his overcoat and stepping away from the stove as if to mark the beginning of official business*]. Now, Mr. Hale, before we move things about, you explain to Mr. Henderson just what you saw when you came here yesterday morning.

County Attorney. By the way, has anything been moved? Are things just as you left them yesterday?

Sheriff [*looking about*]. It's just the same. When it dropped below zero last night I thought I'd better send Frank out this morning to make a fire for us — no use getting pneumonia with a big case on, but I told him not to touch anything except the stove — and you know Frank.

County Attorney. Somebody should have been left here yesterday.

Sheriff. Oh — yesterday. When I had to send Frank to Morris Center for that man who went crazy — I want you to know I had my hands full yesterday. I knew you could get back from Omaha by to-day and as long as I went over everything here myself —

County Attorney. Well, Mr. Hale, tell just what happened when you came here yesterday morning.

Hale. Harry and I had started to town with a load of potatoes. We came along the road from my place and as I got here I said, "I'm going to see if I can't get John Wright to go in with me on a party telephone. I spoke to Wright about it once before and he put me off, saying folks talked too much anyway, and all he asked was peace and quiet — I guess you know about how much he talked himself; but I thought maybe if I went to the house and talked about it before his wife, though I said to Harry that I didn't know as what his wife wanted made much difference to John —

County Attorney. Let's talk about that later, Mr. Hale. I do want to talk about that, but tell now just what happened when you got to the house.

Hale. I didn't hear or see anything; I knocked at the door, and still it was all quiet inside. I knew they must be up, it was past eight o'clock. So I knocked again, and I thought I heard somebody say "Come in." I wasn't sure, I'm not sure yet, but I opened the door — this door *indicating the door by which the two women are still standing*] and there in that rocker — [*pointing to it*] sat Mrs. Wright.

[*They all look at the rocker.*]

COUNTY ATTORNEY. What — was she doing?

HALE. She was rockin' back and forth. She had her apron in her hand and was kind of — pleating it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. And how did she — look?

HALE. Well, she looked queer.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. How do you mean — queer?

HALE. Well, as if she didn't know what she was going to do next. And kind of done up.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. How did she seem to feel about your coming?

HALE. Why, I don't think she minded — one way or other. She didn't pay much attention. I said, "How do, Mrs. Wright, it's cold, ain't it?" And she said "Is it?"— and went on kind of pleating at her apron. Well, I was surprised; she didn't ask me to come up to the stove, or to set down, but just sat there, not even looking at me, so I said, "I want to see John." And then she — laughed. I guess you would call it a laugh. I thought of Harry and the team outside, so I said a little sharp: "Can't I see John?" "No," she says, kind o' dull like. "Ain't he home?" says I. "Yes," says she, "he's home." "Then why can't I see him?" I asked her, out of patience. "'Cause he's dead," says she. *"Dead?"* says I. She just nodded her head, not getting a bit excited, but rockin' back and forth. "Why — where is he?" says I, not knowing what to say. She just pointed upstairs — like that [*himself pointing to the room above*]. I got up, with the idea of going up there. I walked from there to here — then I says, "Why, what did he die of?" "He died of a rope round his neck," says she, and just went on pleatin' at her apron. Well, I went out and called Harry. I thought I might — need help. We went upstairs and there he was lyin'—

COUNTY ATTORNEY. I think I'd rather have you go into that upstairs, where you can point it all out. Just go on now with the rest of the story.

HALE. Well, my first thought was to get that rope off. It looked . . . [*Stops, his face twitches.*] . . . but Harry, he went up to him, and he said, "No, he's dead all right, and we'd better not touch anything." So we went back down stairs. She was still sitting that same way. "Has anybody been notified?" I asked. "No," says he, unconcerned. "Who did this, Mrs. Wright?" said Harry. He said it business-like — and she stopped pleatin' of her apron. "I don't know," she says. "You don't *know?"* says Harry. "No," says she. "Weren't you sleepin' in the bed with him?" says Harry. "Yes," says she, "but I was on the inside." "Somebody slipped a rope round his neck and strangled him and you didn't wake up?" says Harry. "I didn't wake up," she said after him. We must 'a looked as if we didn't see how that could be, for after a minute she said, "I sleep sound." Harry was going to ask her more questions, but I said maybe we ought to let her tell her story first to the coroner, or the sheriff, so Harry went fast as he could to Rivers' place, where there's a telephone.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. And what did Mrs. Wright do when she knew that you had gone for the coroner?

HALE. She moved from that chair to this over here . . . [*Pointing to a small chair in the corner.*] . . . and just sat there with her hands held together and looking down. I got a feeling that I ought to make some conversation, so I said I had come into see if John wanted to put in a telephone, and at that she started to laugh, and then she stopped and looked at me — scared. [*The County Attorney, who has had his notebook out, makes a note.*] I dunno, maybe it wasn't scared. I wouldn't like to say it was. Soon Harry got back, and then Dr. Lloyd came, and you, Mr. Peters, and so I guess that's all I know that you don't.

COUNTY ATTORNEY [*looking around*]. I guess we'll go upstairs first — and then out to the barn and around there. [*To the Sheriff.*] You're convinced that there was nothing important here — nothing that would point to any motive?

SHERIFF. Nothing here but kitchen things.

[*The County Attorney, after again looking around the kitchen, opens the door of a cupboard closet. He gets up on a chair and looks on a shelf. Pulls his hand away, sticky.*]

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Here's a nice mess.

[*The women draw nearer.*]

MRS. PETERS [*to the other woman*]. Oh, her fruit; it did freeze. [*To the Lawyer.*] She worried about that when it turned so cold. She said the fire'd go out and her jars would break.

SHERIFF. Well, can you beat the women! Held for murder and worryin' about her preserves.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. I guess before we're through she may have something more serious than preserves to worry about.

HALE. Well, women are used to worrying over trifles.

[*The two women move a little closer together.*]

COUNTY ATTORNEY [*with the gallantry of a young politician*]. And yet, for all their worries, what would we do without the ladies? [*The women do not unbend. He goes to the sink, takes a dipperful of water from the pail and pouring it into a basin, washes his hands. Starts to wipe them on the roller-towel, turns it for a cleaner place.*] Dirty towels! [*Kicks his foot against the pans under the sink.*] Not much of a housekeeper, would you say, ladies?

MRS. HALE [*stiffly*]. There's a great deal of work to be done on a farm.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. To be sure. And yet . . . [*With a little bow to her.*] . . . I know there are some Dickson county farmhouses which do not have such roller towels.

[*He gives it a pull to expose its full length again.*]

MRS. HALE. Those towels get dirty awful quick. Men's hands aren't always as clean as they might be.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Ah, loyal to your sex, I see. But you and Mrs. Wright were neighbors. I suppose you were friends, too.

MRS. HALE [*shaking her head*]. I've not seen much of her of late years. I've not been in this house — it's more than a year.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. And why was that? You didn't like her?

MRS. HALE. I liked her all well enough. Farmers' wives have their hands full, Mr. Henderson. And then —

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Yes — ?

MRS. HALE [*looking about*]. It never seemed a very cheerful place.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. No — it's not cheerful. I shouldn't say she had the homemaking instinct.

MRS. HALE. Well, I don't know as Wright had, either.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. You mean that they didn't get on very well?

MRS. HALE. No, I don't mean anything. But I don't think a place'd be any cheerful for John Wright's being in it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. I'd like to talk more of that a little later. I want to get the lay of things upstairs now.

[*He goes to the left, where three steps lead to a stair door.*]

SHERIFF. I suppose anything Mrs. Peters does'll be all right. She was to take in some clothes for her, you know, and a few little things. We left in such a hurry yesterday.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Yes, but I would like to see what you take, Mrs. Peters, and keep an eye out for anything that might be of use to us.

MRS. PETERS. Yes, Mr. Henderson.

[*The women listen to the men's steps on the stairs, then look about the kitchen.*]

MRS. HALE. I'd hate to have men coming into my kitchen, snooping around and criticizing.

[*She arranges the pans under sink which the Lawyer had shoved out of place.*]

MRS. PETERS. Of course it's no more than their duty.

MRS. HALE. Duty's all right, but I guess that deputy sheriff that came out to make the fire might have got a little of this on. [*Gives the roller towel a pull.*] Wish I'd thought of that sooner. Seems mean to talk about her for not having things slicked up when she had to come away in such a hurry.

MRS. PETERS [*who has gone to a small table in the left rear corner of the room, and lifted one end of a towel that covers a pan*]. She had bread set. [*Stands still.*]

MRS. HALE [*eyes fixed on a loaf of bread beside the bread-box, which is on a low shelf at the other side of the room. Moves slowly toward it.*] She was going

to put this in there. [*Picks up loaf, then abruptly drops it. In a manner of returning to familiar things.*] It's a shame about her fruit. I wonder if it's all gone. [*Gets up on the chair and looks.*] I think there's some here that's all right, Mrs. Peters. Yes — here; [*Holding it toward the window.*] this is cherries, too. [*Looking again.*] I declare I believe that's the only one. [*Gets down, bottle in her hand. Goes to the sink and wipes it off on the outside.*] She'll feel awful bad after all her hard work in the hot weather. I remember the afternoon I put up my cherries last summer.

[*She puts the bottle on the big kitchen table, center of the room, front table. With a sigh, is about to sit down in the rocking-chair. Before she is seated realizes what chair it is; with a slow look at it, steps back. The chair which she has touched rocks back and forth.*]

MRS. PETERS. Well, I must get those things from the front room closet. [*She goes to the door at the right, but after looking into the other room, steps back.*] You coming with me, Mrs. Hale? You could help me carry them.

[*They go in the other room; reappear, Mrs. Peters carrying a dress and skirt, Mrs. Hale following with a pair of shoes.*]

MRS. PETERS. My, it's cold in there.

[*She puts the cloth on the big table, and hurries to the stove.*]

MRS. HALE [*examining the skirt*]. Wright was close. I think maybe that's why she kept so much to herself. She didn't even belong to the Ladies' Aid. I suppose she felt she couldn't do her part, and then you don't enjoy things when you feel shabby. She used to wear pretty clothes and be lively, when she was Minnie Foster, one of the town girls singing in the choir. But that — oh, that was thirty years ago. This all you was to take in?

MRS. PETERS. She said she wanted an apron. Funny thing to want, for there isn't much to get you dirty in jail, goodness knows. But I suppose just to make her feel more natural. She said they was in the top drawer in this cupboard. Yes, here. And then her little shawl that always hung behind the door. [*Opens stair door and looks.*] Yes, here it is.

[*Quickly shuts door leading upstairs.*]

MRS. HALE [*abruptly moving toward her*]. Mrs. Peters?

MRS. PETERS. Yes, Mrs. Hale?

MRS. HALE. Do you think she did it?

MRS. PETERS [*in a frightened voice*]. Oh, I don't know.

MRS. HALE. Well, I don't think she did. Asking for an apron and her little shawl. Worrying about her fruit.

MRS. PETERS [*starts to speak, glances up, where footsteps are heard in the room above. In a low voice*]. Mr. Peters says it looks bad for her. Mr. Henderson is awful sarcastic in a speech and he'll make fun of her sayin' she didn't wake up.

MRS. HALE. Well, I guess John Wright didn't wake when they was slipping that rope under his neck.

MRS. PETERS. No, it's strange. It must have been done awful crafty and still. They say it was such a — funny way to kill a man, rigging it all up like that.

MRS. HALE. That's just what Mr. Hale said. There was a gun in the house. He says that's what he can't understand.

MRS. PETERS. Mr. Henderson said coming out that what was needed for the case was a motive; something to show anger, or — sudden feeling.

MRS. HALE [*who is standing by the table*]. Well, I don't see any signs of anger around here. [*She puts her hand on the dish towel which lies on the table, stands looking down at table, one half of which is clean, the other half messy.*] It's wiped here. [*Makes a move as if to finish work, then turns and looks at loaf of bread outside the bread-box. Drops towel. In that voice of coming back to familiar things.*] Wonder how they are finding things upstairs? I hope she had it a little more red-up up there. You know, it seems kind of *sneaking.* Locking her up in town and then coming out here and trying to get her own house to turn against her!

MRS. PETERS. But, Mrs. Hale, the law is the law.

MRS. HALE. I s'pose 'tis. [*Unbuttoning her coat.*] Better loosen up your

things, Mrs. Peters. You won't feel them when you go out.

[*Mrs. Peters takes off her fur tippet, goes to hang it on hook at back of room, stands looking at the under part of the small corner table.*]

MRS. PETERS. She was piecing a quilt.

[*She brings the large sewing basket and they look at the bright pieces.*]

MRS. HALE. It's log cabin pattern. Pretty, isn't it? I wonder if she was goin' to quilt it or just knot it?

[*Footsteps have been heard coming down the stairs. The Sheriff enters, followed by Hale and the County Attorney.*]

SHERIFF. They wonder if she was going to quilt it or just knot it.

[*The men laugh, the women look abashed.*]

COUNTY ATTORNEY [*rubbing his hands over the stove*]. Frank's fire didn't do much up there, did it? Well, let's go out to the barn and get that cleared up.

[*The men go outside.*]

MRS. HALE [*resentfully*]. I don't know as there's anything so strange, our takin' up our time with little things while we're waiting for them to get the evidence. [*She sits down at the big table smoothing out a block of decision.*] I don't see as it's anything to laugh about.

MRS. PETERS [*apologetically*]. Of course they've got awful important things on their minds.

[*Pulls up a chair and joins Mrs. Hale at the table.*]

MRS. HALE [*examining another block*]. Mrs. Peters, look at this one. Here, this is the one she was working on, and look at the sewing! All the rest of it has been so nice and even. And look at this! It's all over the place! Why, it looks as if she didn't know what she was about!

[*After she has said this they look at each other, then start to glance back at the door. After an instant Mrs. Hale has pulled at a knot and ripped the sewing.*]

MRS. PETERS. Oh, what are you doing, Mrs. Hale?

MRS. HALE [*mildly*]. Just pulling out a stitch or two that's not sewed very good. [*Threading a needle.*] Bad sewing always made me fidgety.

MRS. PETERS [*nervously*]. I don't think we ought to touch things.

MRS. HALE. I'll just finish up this end. [*Suddenly stopping and leaning forward.*] Mrs. Peters?

MRS. PETERS. Yes, Mrs. Hale?

MRS. HALE. What do you suppose she was so nervous about?

MRS. PETERS. Oh — I don't know. I don't know as she was nervous. I sometimes sew awful queer when I'm just tired. [*Mrs. Hale starts to say something, looks at Mrs. Peters, then goes on sewing.*] Well, I must get these things wrapped up. They may be through sooner than we think. [*Putting apron and other things together.*] I wonder where I can find a piece of paper, and string.

MRS. HALE. In that cupboard, maybe.

MRS. PETERS [*looking in cupboard*]. Why, here's a bird-cage. [*Holds it up.*] Did she have a bird, Mrs. Hale?

MRS. HALE. Why, I don't know whether she did or not — I've not been here for so long. There was a man around last year selling canaries cheap, but I don't know as she took one; maybe she did. She used to sing real pretty herself.

MRS. PETERS [*glancing around*]. Seems funny to think of a bird here. But she must have had one, or why should she have a cage? I wonder what happened to it?

MRS. HALE. I s'pose maybe the cat got it.

MRS. PETERS. No, she didn't have a cat. She's got that feeling some people have about cats — being afraid of them. My cat got in her room and she was real upset and asked me to take it out.

MRS. HALE. My sister Bessie was like that. Queer, ain't it?

MRS. PETERS [*examining the cage*]. Why, look at this door. It's broke. One hinge is pulled apart.

MRS. HALE [*looking too*]. Looks as if some one must have been rough with it.

MRS. PETERS. Why, yes.

[*She brings the cage forward and puts it on the table.*]

MRS. HALE. I wish if they're going to find any evidence they'd be about it. I don't like this place.

MRS. PETERS. But I'm awful glad you came with me, Mrs. Hale. It would be lonesome for me sitting here alone.

MRS. HALE. It would, wouldn't it? [*Dropping her sewing.*] But I tell you what I do wish, Mrs. Peters. I wish I had come over some times when *she* was here. I — [*Looking around the room.*] — wish I had.

MRS. PETERS. But of course you were awful busy, Mrs. Hale — your house and your children.

MRS. HALE. I could've come. I stayed away because it weren't cheerful — and that's why I ought to have come. I — I've never liked this place. Maybe because it's down in a hollow and you don't see the road. I dunno what it is, but it's a lonesome place and always was. I wish I had come over to see Minnie Foster sometimes. I can see now —

[*Shakes her head.*]

MRS. PETERS. Well, you mustn't reproach yourself, Mrs. Hale. Somehow we just don't see how it is with other folks until — something comes up.

MRS. HALE. Not having children makes less work — but it makes a quiet house, and Wright out to work all day, and no company when he did come in. Did you know John Wright, Mrs. Peters?

MRS. PETERS. Not to know him; I've seen him in town. They say he was a good man.

MRS. HALE. Yes — good; he didn't drink, and kept his word as well as most, I guess, and paid his debts. But he was a hard man, Mrs. Peters. Just to pass the time of day with him. [*Shivers.*] Like a raw wind that gets to the bone. [*Pauses, her eye falling on the cage.*] I should think she would 'a wanted a bird. But what do you suppose went with it?

MRS. PETERS. I don't know, unless it got sick and died.

[*She reaches over and swings the broken door swings it again, both women watch it.*]

MRS. HALE. You weren't raised round here, were you? [*Mrs. Peters shakes her head.*] You didn't know — her?

MRS. PETERS. Not till they brought her yesterday.

MRS. HALE. She — come to think of it, she was kind of like a bird herself — real sweet and pretty, but kind of timid and — fluttery. How — she — did — change. [*Silence; then as if struck by a happy thought and relieved to get back to every day things.*] Tell you what, Mrs. Peters, why don't you take the quilt in with you? It might take up her mind.

MRS. PETERS. Why, I think that's a real nice idea, Mrs. Hale. There couldn't possibly be any objection to it, could there? Now, just what would I take? I wonder if her patches are in here — and her things.

[*They look in the sewing basket.*]

MRS. HALE. Here's some red. I expect this has got sewing things in it. [*Brings out a fancy box.*] What a pretty box. Looks like something somebody would give you. Maybe her scissors are in here. [*Opens box. Suddenly puts her hand to her nose.*] Why — [*Mrs. Peters bends nearer, then turns her face away.*] There's something wrapped up in this piece of silk.

MRS. PETERS. Why, this isn't her scissors.

MRS. HALE [*lifting the silk*]. Oh, Mrs. Peters — it's —

[*Mrs. Peters bends closer.*]

MRS. PETERS. It's the bird.

MRS. HALE [*jumping up*]. But, Mrs. Peters — look at it. Its neck! Look at its neck! It's all — other side *to*.

MRS. PETERS. Somebody — wrung — its neck.

[*Their eyes met. A look of growing comprehension of horror. Steps are heard outside. Mrs. Hale slips box under quilt pieces, and sinks into her chair. Enter Sheriff and County Attorney. Mrs. Peters rises.*]

COUNTY ATTORNEY [*as one turning from serious things to little pleasantries*]. Well, ladies, have you decided whether she was going to quilt it or knot it?

MRS. PETERS. We think she was going to — knot it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Well, that's interesting, I'm sure. [*Seeing the bird-cage.*] Has the bird flown?

MRS. HALE [*putting more quilt pieces over the box*]. We think the — cat got it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY [*preoccupied*]. Is there a cat?

[*Mrs. Hale glances in a quick covert way at Mrs. Peters.*]

Mrs. Peters. Well, not now. They're superstitious, you know. They leave.

County Attorney [*to Sheriff Peters, continuing an interrupted conversation*]. No sign at all of any one having come from the outside. Their own rope. Now let's go up again and go over it piece by piece. [*They start upstairs.*] It would have to have been some one who knew just the —

[*Mrs. Peters sits down. The two women sit there not looking at one another, but as if peering into something and at the same time holding back. When they talk now it is in the manner of feeling their way over strange ground, as if afraid of what they are saying, but as if they can not help saying it.*]

Mrs. Hale. She liked the bird. She was going to bury it in that pretty box.

Mrs. Peters [*in a whisper*]. When I was a girl — my kitten — there was a boy took a hatchet, and before my eyes — and before I could get there — [*Covers her face an instant.*] If they hadn't held me back I would have — [*Catches herself, looks upstairs where steps are heard, falters weakly*] — hurt him.

Mrs. Hale [*with a slow look around her*]. I wonder how it would seem never to have had any children around. [*Pause.*] No, Wright wouldn't like the bird — a thing that sang. She used to sing. He killed that, too.

Mrs. Peters [*moving uneasily*]. We don't know who killed the bird.

Mrs. Hale. I knew John Wright.

Mrs. Peters. It was an awful thing was done in this house that night, Mrs. Hale. Killing a man while he slept, slipping a rope around his neck that choked the life out of him.

Mrs. Hale. His neck. Choked the life out of him.

[*Her hand goes out and rests on the bird-cage.*]

Mrs. Peters [*with rising voice*]. We don't know who killed him. We don't *know*.

Mrs. Hale [*her own feeling not interrupted*]. If there'd been years and years of nothing, then a bird to sing to you, it would be awful — still, after the bird was still.

Mrs. Peters [*something within her speaking*]. I know what stillness is. When we homesteaded in Dakota, and my first baby died — after he was two years old, and me with no other then —

Mrs. Hale [*moving*]. How soon do you suppose they'll be through, looking for the evidence?

Mrs. Peters. I know what stillness is. [*Pulling herself back.*] The law has got to punish crime, Mrs. Hale.

Mrs. Hale [*not as if answering that*]. I wish you'd seen Minnie Foster when she wore a white dress with blue ribbons and stood up there in the choir and sang. [*A look around the room.*] Oh, I *wish* I'd come over here once in a while? That was a crime! That was a crime! Who's going to punish that?

Mrs. Peters [*looking upstairs*]. We mustn't — take on.

Mrs. Hale. I might have known she needed help! I know how things can be — for women. I tell you, it's queer, Mrs. Peters. We live close together and we live far apart. We all go through the same things — it's all just a different kind of the same thing. [*Brushes her eyes, noticing the bottle of fruit, reaches out for it.*] If I was you I wouldn't tell her her fruit was gone. Tell her it *ain't*. Tell her it's all right. Take this in to prove it to her. She — she may never know whether it was broke or not.

Mrs. Peters [*takes the bottle, looks about for something to wrap it in; takes petticoat from the clothes brought from the other room, very nervously begins winding this around the bottle. In a false voice*]. My, it's a good thing the men couldn't hear us. Wouldn't they just laugh! Getting all stirred up over a little thing like a — dead canary. As if that could have anything to do with — with — wouldn't they *laugh!*

[*The men are heard coming down stairs.*]

Mrs. Hale [*under her breath*]. Maybe they would — maybe they wouldn't.

County Attorney. No, Peters, it's all perfectly clear except a reason for doing it. But you know juries when it comes to women. If there was some definite thing. Something to show — some-

thing to make a story about — a thing that would connect up with this strange way of doing it.

[*The women's eyes meet for an instant. Enter Hale from outer door.*]

HALE. Well, I've got the team around. Pretty cold out there.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. I'm going to stay here a while by myself. [*To the Sheriff.*] You can send Frank out for me, can't you? I want to go over everything. I'm not satisfied that we can't do better.

SHERIFF. Do you want to see what Mrs. Peters is going to take in?

[*The Lawyer goes to the table, picks up the apron, laughs.*]

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Oh, I guess they're not very dangerous things the ladies have picked out. [*Moves a few things about, disturbing the quilt pieces which cover the box. Steps back.*] No, Mrs. Peters doesn't need supervising. For that matter, a sheriff's wife is married to the law. Ever think of it that way, Mrs. Peters?

MRS. PETERS. Not — just that way.

SHERIFF [*chuckling*]. Married to the law. [*Moves toward the other room.*] I just want you to come in here a minute, George. We ought to take a look at these windows.

COUNTY ATTORNEY [*scoffingly*]. Oh, windows!

SHERIFF. We'll be right out, Mr. Hale.

[*Hale goes outside. The Sheriff follows the County Attorney into the other room. Then Mrs. Hale rises, hands tight together, looking intensely at Mrs. Peters, whose eyes make a slow turn, finally meeting Mrs. Hale's. A moment Mrs. Hale holds her, then her own eyes point the way to where the box is concealed. Suddenly Mrs. Peters throws back quilt pieces and tries to put the box in the bag she is wearing. It is too big. She opens box, starts to take bird out, cannot touch it, goes to pieces, stands there helpless. Sound of a knob turning in the other room. Mrs. Hale snatches the box and puts it in the pocket of her big coat. Enter County Attorney and Sheriff.*

COUNTY ATTORNEY [*facetiously*]. Well, Henry, at least we found out that she was not going to quilt it. She was going to — what is it you call it, ladies?

MRS. HALE [*her hand against her pocket*]. We call it — knot it, Mr. Henderson.

[*Curtain.*]

THE POT BOILER

A Satire

By Alice Gerstenberg

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THE POT BOILER was first produced by the Players' Workshop, Chicago, Ill., on the night of November 20th, 1916, with the following cast:

THOMAS PINIKLES SUD [*the playwright*].....*William Ziegler Nourse.*
WOULDBY [*the novice*].....*Morton Howard, Jr.*
MR. IVORY [*the financier*].....*Henry Ryan.*
MR. RULER [*the hero*].....*Donovan Yeuell.*
MISS IVORY [*the heroine*].....*Caroline Kohl.*
MR. INKWELL [*the villain*].....*H. C. Swartz.*
MRS. PENCIL [*the woman*].....*Anna Buxton.*

THE POT BOILER is published for the first time. The editors are indebted to Miss Gerstenberg for permission to include it in this volume. The professional and amateur stage rights on this play are strictly reserved by the author. Applications from amateurs to produce the play should be addressed to Norman Lee Swartout, 24 Blackburn Road, Summit, N. J. Professionals should address Miss Alice Gerstenberg, 539 Deming Place, Chicago, Ill.

THE POT BOILER

A Satire

By Alice Gerstenberg

[Scene: *A stage only half set for a morning rehearsal and dimly lighted. Sud, a successful playwright, enters in a hurry carrying a leather bag of manuscripts.*]

Stage Hand. Good morning, Mr. Sud.

Sud. Good morning, Gus. Just set two doors; that'll be all I'll need this morning. We're rehearsing for lines. [*Steps down stage and calls front.*] Joe, I'm expecting a young man, it's all right, let him in.

Wouldby [*from auditorium back*]. I'm here now, Mr. Sud.

Sud. Come up, Mr. Wouldby. Some more border lights, please.

Wouldby. It's very good of you to let me in.

Sud. I was fond of your father. I am glad to see his son.

Wouldby. I have written a play, too.

Sud. Too bad, too bad, you make the price of paper go up.

Wouldby. It must be wonderful to be the master playwright of our day. Everybody knows Mr. Thomas Pinikles Sud.

Sud [*setting stage*]. Yes, it is a privilege to be a friend of mine!

Wouldby [*pursuing Sud*]. Will you read my manuscript, sir?

Sud. Never roll a manuscript. I see very well you don't even know the first principles.

Wouldby. How can I learn the first principles? No one will tell me.

Sud. Wait, I will do a great thing for you, let you stay and see a dress rehearsal of my latest play, "The Pot Boiler." In it I have used all dramatic principles.

Wouldby. What are they?

Sud. Well, for instance, this pencil is the woman in the case.

Wouldby. Pencil!

Sud. This inkwell is the villain, although that's really too dark for him. Deep-eyed villains are out of fashion.

Wouldby. Inkwell!

Sud. The heroine is Miss Ivory paper cutter.

Wouldby. Ivory!

Sud. Mr. Ruler is the hero.

Wouldby. Ruler!

[*Other characters enter from stage door.*]

Sud. I haven't finished writing it, but we're going through it this morning as far as I have written, then I shall see how to go on. Here are the players now. Line up, please, and let me see your costumes. [*He studies them.*] Now to work — [*Rubbing his hands.*] to work — clear the stage!

[*Mrs. Pencil and Ruler go out left; Mr. and Miss Ivory and Inkwell go out right and close the door.*]

Sud. Mr. Wouldby, if you sit down here with me, we'll be out of the way. [*Sud and Wouldby sit on two stools way down right.*] You must imagine that this room is the library in Mr. Ivory's house. [*Sud claps his hands and calls.*] Ready.

[*There is a pause, then the door up left opens and Mrs. Pencil comes in; her pantomime is as Sud explains it to Wouldby.*]

Sud [*in stage whisper to Wouldby*]. The adventuress — she comes in — she has been cut — she is worried — that nervous twitching of lips and narrowing of eyes are always full of suspense — she takes off her gloves, her hat — that's good business. A door opens — she starts — by starting she shows you she is guilty of something —

Miss Ivory [*without hat or gloves enters from right*]. Oh, there you are, Mrs. Pencil.

MRS. PENCIL. Yes, I'm back.

MISS IVORY. I thought I should have to drink my tea without you.

[*They sit down to tea — Miss Ivory back of table center. Mrs. Pencil left of table.*]

SUD [*in stage whisper to Wouldby*]. That tells the audience what time of the day it is; besides, drinking afternoon tea shows Miss Ivory is in society.

MRS. PENCIL. Isn't your father going to join us?

SUD [*aside*]. That's merely to show the girl has a father.

MISS IVORY. No, he is talking business with Mr. Inkwell.

MRS. PENCIL [*starting*]. Inkwell!

MISS IVORY. Yes, do you know him?

MRS. PENCIL [*evasively*]. I? Oh — no.

MISS IVORY. You've heard of him?

MRS. PENCIL. Yes — of course —

SUD [*aside*]. Do you catch it? Do you see how her nervousness and her few words at once suggest that there is a link between Mrs. Pencil and Inkwell? That's where I show my technique.

WOULDBY [*scratching his head*]. Technique! How can I learn it?

SUD. It is the secret that every playwright locks in his breast. Keep the young ones out! *Mum* is the word!

MISS IVORY. I am so sorry father has all this trouble with the brick-layers. They shouldn't have gone on a strike — just now — when you are visiting us.

SUD [*to Wouldby*]. That tells that Mrs. Pencil is a guest in Miss Ivory's house.

MISS IVORY. When you were here last year my mother —

SUD [*aside*]. The girl hesitates — they both look sorrowful; we had to cut down the cast, so I killed off her mother.

MRS. PENCIL [*sadly, with foreign accent*]. Ah, my dear — we were such close friends — since my arrival in this country —

SUD [*aside*]. You see, I had to make her a foreigner. A villainess always talks with a foreign accent.

MRS. PENCIL. I haven't had much time to read particulars about the strike. Does your father still refuse to arbitrate?

MISS IVORY [*haughtily*]. What right have brick-layers to make rules for my father? He would show his weakness if he gave in — I have faith that what he does is right.

SUD [*to Wouldby*]. The innocent heroine, so cool and pure and white.

[*The right door opens and Inkwell enters — he starts as he sees Mrs. Pencil; there is a straight look of recognition between them which Miss Ivory does not see.*]

SUD [*aside*]. That's a dramatic scene. Doesn't it thrill your spine?

MISS IVORY. Mrs. Pencil, may I introduce Mr. Inkwell — [*Inkwell and Mrs. Pencil bow slightly.*] Will you have a dish of tea?

SUD. Cup, cup of tea.

MISS IVORY. Dish; *dish* of tea, or I quit. [*Pause.*] Which is it?

SUD. Oh, very well, dish if you like.

[*Sud's manner indicates he gives in simply to let the rehearsal progress, but that he will settle with Miss Ivory later.*]

MISS IVORY. Please tell me that you have ordered the strikers to come to father's terms?

MR. INKWELL [*at right of table*]. He is looking through his safe for more papers so he asked me to wait in here.

SUD. That's an explanation why he came in.

MISS IVORY [*offering cup*]. How many lumps?

SUD [*aside*]. That question of the number of lumps is very important; it gives a natural air to the scene.

MISS IVORY. I am going to the dining-room to get some arrack for your tea.

MR. INKWELL [*nervously*]. Oh, please don't trouble —

MISS IVORY. No trouble at all.

[*Exit right.*]

SUD. When you want to get a character out, you've got to get 'em out.

MR. INKWELL [*at right of table, to Mrs. Pencil*]. You here!

MRS. PENCIL [*at left of table*]. Sch! I had to come! I couldn't live without you any longer —

INKWELL. But in this house?

MRS. PENCIL. I was her mother's friend.

INKWELL. You are indiscreet —

MRS. PENCIL. I was desperate for you!

You kept putting me off — when I read about this strike I had to come.

SUD. Mrs. Pencil is the dreadful woman! A play can't exist without her —

WOULDBY. You mean she was his —

SUD [*seriously*]. Oh, yes — the more fuss we make about her the better.

MRS. PENCIL. Oh! Clem! You aren't glad to see me! Oh! that I have lived for this!!!

[*She tears around the stage waving her hands in grief — making faces of agony. Sud rises in astonishment and follows her left.*]

SUD [*shrieks in anger*]. Idiot! Can't you talk! Do you think I write lines to be cut? How dare you cut my lines!!!

MRS. PENCIL. I've done just what it says. [*She takes her part from table, reads from it and shows it to him.*] "Mrs. Pencil shows extreme despair and passionately —"

SUD. That's not the play! That's the moving picture version!!! Come here.

[*He fumbles with his papers. Takes blue pencil to her part, changes his mind and uses red pencil — and puts them back of different ears.*]

WOULDBY. Oh! Have you the same play ready for the movies?

SUD. I write in columns — alongside of each other. Dramatic version, moving picture, novelization — for magazines — newspapers and books.

WOULDBY. All *at once!*

SUD. Yes!

WOULDBY. What are all the pins for?

SUD. When I cut out a line one place — I keep it until I find a place somewhere else to patch it in.

[*Hands new lines to Mrs. Pencil, who is back of table center.*]

WOULDBY. A great playwright has to be economical with his great ideas!

SUD. Yes, if he wants a yacht.

MRS. PENCIL [*studying her book*]. Now I see, now I see — Mr. Sud. Shall I go on?

SUD. Yes, go on!

[*Sud comes down right to Wouldby.*]

MRS. PENCIL. Oh! Clem — I was so frightened when I heard about the strikers. Even if you are their leader now, they might turn and murder you.

[*Mrs. Pencil and Inkwell play center, front of table.*]

INKWELL. Nonsense, I control the strikers, they come to me for orders. I'll stop this strike as soon as old Ivory gives me my price.

MRS. PENCIL. What do the brick-layers want?

INKWELL. They want shorter hours, more pay, better light — better air —

[*Inkwell stops and looks at Sud.*]

SUD. Go on — go on — don't glare at me!

INKWELL. Pardon me, Mr. Sud — but you have me say the brick-layers want better air. It doesn't sound right. You see brick-layers work out of doors and the air there is — I beg your pardon — it's in no way of criticism, sir —

SUD. Come here. [*He cuts the line, using wrong colored pencil first.*] Leave out "light and air." That's a confusion from bad typing in the serial version. Go on, Mr. Inkwell.

INKWELL [*sits right of table and Mrs. Pencil left*]. See here, Kate, you keep out of this business — I'm not going to be spied on by any woman.

MRS. PENCIL [*in whisper*]. Who is spying on you?

INKWELL [*in whisper*]. You!!

MRS. PENCIL. I?

SUD [*smacks his lips*]. Now we are coming to a big scene! There is nothing so effective as the repetition of the same words brought up to a climax. Begin again, Mrs. Pencil. "Who is spying on you?"

MRS. PENCIL. Who is spying on you?

INKWELL. You!

MRS. PENCIL. I?

INKWELL. You!

MRS. PENCIL. I?

INKWELL. You!

MRS. PENCIL. I?

SUD [*tearing his hair — going to them*]. Parrots! Nothing but parrots! Increase the stress — build up the scene — build — build!

INKWELL. How can we build when you don't give us any lines?

SUD. What do you call yourselves actors for if you can't supply acting when the playwright uses dashes! — This is the biggest scene in the play. [*Crosses to lower left.*] The very fact that I don't

give you a lot of literary lines puts me in the class of the most forceful dramatists of the day! My plays are no wishy-washy lines! They are full of action — red-blood — of flesh and blood! Now you do *your* part — bing-bang stuff! — shake them in their chairs out there — make shivers run up their spines! Make 'em *feel* you! Compel their applause! Now go to *it!* Go to it!!!

[*Sud sets the tempo, repeating their words.*]

INKWELL. You!

MRS. PENCIL. I?

INKWELL. You!

MRS. PENCIL. I?

SUD [*shouts*]. Get it over! Get it over!

INKWELL. You!

MRS. PENCIL. I?

SUD [*shouts*]. Get it over! Mr. Wouldby, is it getting over?

WOULDBY [*looks at footlights*]. I don't see anything get over.

SUD. He doesn't see it! You hear! He doesn't see it! Begin again! And please, please, please — get it over — over!!

[*He motions violently with his arms during following scene as if to help them raise the vitality of the scene. Sud sets tempo again.*]

MRS. PENCIL. Who is spying on you?

INKWELL. You!

MRS. PENCIL. I?

INKWELL. You!!

MRS. PENCIL. I??

INKWELL. You!!!

MRS. PENCIL. I???

INKWELL. You!!!!!

MRS. PENCIL. I??????

INKWELL [*fiercely*]. You!!!!!!!

MRS. PENCIL. I???????

INKWELL. What do you call it then, coming here after me like this?

MRS. PENCIL. What do you mean — like this?

SUD [*shrieks — beside himself*]. Like what?

MRS. PENCIL. Like this?

SUD. Accent it — stress it — increase it! Like *what?*

MRS. PENCIL. Like this!

SUD. Like what?

MRS. PENCIL. Like this!

SUD [*rushes around circuit of stage and ends near Wouldby*]. The best scene in the play — ruined — ruined! I'm noted for my strong, laconic scenes and you make me suffer like this. Perfectly hopeless — I say increase — you decrease; nothing but animal sounds! Nothing but a machine! Oh! What's the use! Go on, go on — now you see, Mr. Wouldby, how actors can make plays fail —

MRS. PENCIL. If you'd write us a decent play once we might —

SUD. No back-talk, madam! I haven't engaged you yet. If you can't play it any better, I'll let you out! Show us what you can do with the rest of the scene! By Heaven — if you can't pound his chest right the box office will lose money on you!

WOULDBY [*his eyes popping*]. Oh! Must she pound him?

SUD. Seeing a woman pounding a man's chest and hearing her scream is worth two dollars to anybody. Go on, Mrs. Pencil.

MRS. PENCIL. You are keeping something from me? You have deceived me! You dog! Tell me! Tell me! Who is she? Where is she? You are keeping something from me!

[*She pounds Inkwell in a rage.*]

WOULDBY [*in innocent wonderment*]. Is she trying to yank it out of his chest?

SUD. Pound! Pound! Get it over! [*Sud rushes back between Mrs. Pencil and Inkwell, pushes her down left, drags Inkwell to center, grasps his coat lapel, shakes him violently and shouts her lines: "You are keeping something from me." and pushes Inkwell to right. Sud turns quickly to left and shows her his manuscript.*] I wrote "applause" here. You've got to get applause here — so pound!

INKWELL. Would you mind skipping the scene to-day? I'll wear a foot-ball suit to-morrow.

SUD [*in scorn*]. Just like an actor to have a personal prejudice against a part.

INKWELL. I'm not "suited" to it yet — but with the proper costume —

SUD [*in scorn*]. You must not rely on costume! Think of your art!

WOULDBY. But why must she pound him so hard?

SUD [*down left*]. Because he is the

villain and the audience likes to see him get it.

MRS. PENCIL [*at right and Inkwell to her left*]. Who is she? You are keeping something from me!

WOULDBY. What has he done to make him the villain?

SUD. I didn't want an explanation here, so I had to interrupt them—sch—here comes Miss Ivory.

[*Miss Ivory enters.*]

SUD. Such interruptions reek with dramatic intensity.

MISS IVORY. Here is the arrack for you, Mr. Inkwell—

INKWELL [*accepting it*]. Thank you.

MRS. PENCIL [*nervously*]. I think I'll take my hat to my room—

[*Inkwell gives her her hat. She goes out.*]

SUD [*aside*]. Not a bad excuse, the hat! Fh? I had to get her out.

WOULDBY. Very natural—yes—indeed—

MISS IVORY [*seated at right of table. Inkwell stands back of table—center*]. Well, Mr. Inkwell, I hope we may yet succeed in claiming you as a friend—instead of coddling you as an enemy.

INKWELL. If you treat all your enemies so well—what must you do for your friends?

MISS IVORY. We abuse those we love.

SUD [*nudging Wouldby — aside*]. Quite epigrammatic, eh?

INKWELL. Even abuse at such fair hands could only please.

SUD [*aside*]. Did you catch the subtlety of that line?

MISS IVORY [*nervously*]. Wi—wi—will you have some more tea?

INKWELL [*coming left of table—to be opposite her—catching her hand.*] I don't want tea—I want you! I love you!

SUD. Wait a moment! That's too abrupt! I've some more lines here somewhere. [*Looks through slips pinned in manuscript.*] I cut some out of the beginning of the act. When the first curtain went up and the maid was discovered dusting the room I had the Irish butler make love to her. [*To Wouldby.*] [*Handing Inkwell a paragraph.*] There, Inkwell, are the love lines I was looking for. Proceed, please.

MISS IVORY. Shall I go back?

INKWELL. To tea.

MISS IVORY. Wi—will—will you have some m—more—t—tea?

INKWELL [*catching her hand and bringing her forward, he gives speech with Irish accent*]. I don't want tea—I want you! I love you! Oh! My darlint, it is a terrible sensation I'ave for you, I'ave—'and me your little 'and in moine, for the loikes of you I never—[*As all look dazed and Inkwell has trouble twisting his tongue.*] I beg pardon, Mr. Sud, but this is a butler making love—I am playing the part of a gentleman—

SUD [*has dropped from his stool and retired in tears and rage up right*]. Haven't you any brains of your own? If a musician can transpose music by sight, can't you do the same to dialogue?

INKWELL. But a gentleman doesn't make love like a—

SUD [*goes up stage again—ends at his stool by Wouldby*]. He means the same—now go on—I can't stand these arguments. They will give me apoplexy!

MISS IVORY. Oh! Come on, Robert, say anything.

[*They sit at table again.*]

INKWELL. Ahem!

MISS IVORY. Wi—wi—will you have some more t—tea?

INKWELL. I don't want tea! I want you! I love you! Oh! My darling—it is a wonderful feeling—this one—that—which I have for you—indeed—that one which I have for you—put your hand in mine—for a woman like you never before fr—fr—never before have I seen a woman such as you—

[*Again he has brought Miss Ivory down center.*]

SUD. My stars! Leave out the h's. That—which—such!—Get it clear for to-morrow's rehearsal.

INKWELL [*puts paragraph in his pocket—hesitatingly, doubtfully, sarcastically*]. I ought to have my name on the program as co-author.

[*Exit left.*]

SUD [*jumps forward*]. You ought to have it cut out of the program when you forget to act! [*Raps on floor and cries out.*] Mr. Ruler—Mr. Ruler—Pay some attention to your cues, please!—

[*Sud goes off stage center over bridge into pit.*]

RULER [*pokes head in from left*]. Beg pardon, sir — I didn't hear my cue!

SUD [*at right of center*]. It's your business to listen for it.

RULER. But they didn't give me the cue!

SUD. Well, what is your cue?

RULER [*not seen*]. What is it?

SUD. I asked you what your cue was?

RULER [*appears*]. What is it?

SUD. Is your hearing perfectly clear?

RULER. Perfectly.

SUD. Then will you kindly tell me what your cue is?

RULER. What is it?

SUD. I shall go mad! I'm dealing with lunatics! Lunatics — Once again I ask you, Mr. Ruler — if you can *hear* — [*Yells.*] Kindly read from your book and tell me what your cue is —

RULER [*yells furiously and is now down stage*]. I've been trying to tell you my cue is "WHAT IS IT!"

[*During this scene all the other players come in to see the fight and grin.*]

SUD [*wipes perspiration from brow*]. Heart disease! Heart disease — I shall die of it! That line was cut long ago!!! [*Sud walks back and forth across the pit.*] The trouble with you actors is you can't forget. Oh! If you could only forget!

WOULDBY [*meekly*]. I always thought actors had to remember.

SUD. Any fool can remember —

RULER. See here, Mr. Sud — I don't take abuse! In fact, it's my first experience taking it from authors. In all the other companies I've been in the manager kept the playwright out. He wouldn't have him meddling about!

[*Sud stops short during this speech — turns — straightens up — buttons coat — adjusts tie — faces Ruler.*]

SUD. Mr. Ruler, I am backing the show. I haven't engaged you because you can act, but because you were born good-looking, which is scarcely a compliment to your own efforts. [*Other players retire now laughing at Ruler.*] If you please we will proceed. I'll find a line here somewhere in my treasure note books.

[*He goes upstairs and stands near border lights aside to hunt through many books he has in his pockets. Ruler sits left of table to rest and smoke. Mr. Ivory and Mrs. Pencil play cards out of character up stage.*]

MISS IVORY [*talks out of character and gets light from Ruler for her cigarette*]. Did you see the advance notices in the paper this morning, Jack — saying the Pot-Boiler is sold out three weeks in advance?

RULER. Bill told me there's a steady line outside of the box office.

MISS IVORY. I have visions of rehearsing all night outside the night before the opening.

RULER. I'm used to doing that, my dear. What gets me is the story of the plot the Sunday edition printed. How can the newspaper know the plot before the playwright does?

MISS IVORY. Doesn't Mr. Sud know his own plot?

RULER. Why! No, my part's not written after the second act.

MISS IVORY. My part isn't either, but it doesn't worry me. These authors — [*She points to her forehead.*] I don't memorize until dress rehearsal night. What's the *use*. *They* don't know *themselves* by that time what lines they told you to keep in or put in or take out. The next morning the critics re-write it *anyway* for the manager — *I* don't begin to memorize really — until we 're settled for a *run*.

RULER [*worried*]. You'll throw me all out if you give wrong cues —

MISS IVORY [*rises and strolls about*]. Oh! When I can't use my tongue, I let my eyes talk. The public doesn't know the difference. *I* don't have to act, just be myself. They engage *me* for my *eyes*.

SUD. Ah! Here's a precious line [*Goes up to Ruler.*], take it down, Mr. Ruler. "I was in the neighborhood looking for some real estate." [*All the players suppress a laugh.*] Now, Mr. Ruler, you enter in time — [*Sud goes down the stairs again.*] You enter in time to interrupt Mr. Inkwell's declaration of love to Miss Ivory. They spring apart —

spring! Mr. Inkwell! [*Inkwell springs.*] No, the house is not on fire! — I didn't say jump.

INKWELL. Spring is the same as jump!

[*Ruler enters from left. Inkwell goes right, Miss Ivory comes center.*]

SUD. There is no time to discuss synonyms. Go on, Miss Ivory.

MISS IVORY. Oh! Jack — hello! — where'd *you* come from?

RULER. I was in the neighborhood looking at some real estate — Hello, Inkwell — how's the strike?

[*Miss Ivory and Ruler cross to give Ruler the center.*]

INKWELL. If you could persuade Mr. Ivory to —

RULER. No — Inkwell — I'm not converted to your view! I have my own theories!

SUD [*at left speaks across in delight to Wouldby*]. Now we are coming to the kernel of the play's success. The new viewpoint — Use all the stock character and situations you want, but add a new twist.

WOULDBY. What does Ruler think?

SUD. Listen.

RULER. I believe sternly in justice — righteous expiation of sin — only in that way can we progress to higher things.

SUD. Forms, not things.

RULER. Beg pardon, forms — the position I hold to-day is the result of my desires in my previous life — when the trumpet calls me into the next — there I shall reap the harvest of what I have sown here. Why should we help the brick-layers?

[*Miss Ivory interrupts, "Mr. Sud."*]

SUD [*waves her silent*]. Sch!

RULER. If they chose in their past life to be born brick-layers here, have we the right —

[*Miss Ivory interrupts several times. Miss Ivory is on stage left.*]

SUD. Sch!!

RULER. I ask you — have we the right to tear down the building they designed when they were here before? Have we the right to say to them how they shall lay the bricks in the foundation for their next life? Have we the right —

MISS IVORY. Mr. Sudd!!!

SUD [*at last in desperation*]. Well. what is it, Miss Ivory?

MISS IVORY. Excuse me, Mr. Sud — but all this time — while Ruler is talking — I don't know what to do with my *hands!* Couldn't you *cut* his lines?

RULER. I protest! Mr. Sud, I would resent having a part shortened on me because the leading lady doesn't know what to do with her hands. I really think in this speech of mine you have shown your talent. To cut one word of it would do you a great injustice!

SUD [*smiles at Ruler*]. Thank you! Quite so! Quite so! Miss Ivory, during this scene you might be — you might be — be — fanning yourself — to keep yourself the heroine, cool and white.

WOULDBY. How well you understand human nature. The play is really more important than the players — isn't it?

SUD [*aside. Goes back on stage and sits next to Wouldby*]. Of course, but actors are so superbly conceited.

WOULDBY. I know — poor things!

SUD. Mr. Ivory's entrance.

WOULDBY. The girl's father?

IVOBY [*enters*]. I could not find the papers in the safe, Inkwell. Ah — how-do-you-do, Jack.

POSITIONS

Inkwell *Miss Ivory*
Mr. Ivory *Ruler*

[*Ivory has crossed to Ruler and is between Miss Ivory and Ruler.*]

RULER. Good morning, Mr. Ivory.

IVORY. Daughter, dear — do you know anything about the papers in the safe?

SUD. Keep up the suspense — Inkwell.

INKWELL. I have no lines here.

SUD. A villain should sustain the suggestion of villainy whether he has lines or not. Look uneasy — tremble —

[*Inkwell looks uneasy and trembles.*]

IVORY. But if I see him tremble, Mr. Sud, wouldn't I ask him if he had a chill?

SUD. It's not your business to be looking his way just then. Again, Inkwell.

[*Inkwell trembles, etc.*]

SUD [*yells to Ivory*]. Don't catch his eye!

IVORY [*to Inkwell*]. Will you tremble again please?

[*Inkwell does so patiently.*]

SUD. Count five for the tremble.

Again please, "Daughter dear, do you know anything about the papers in the safe?"

IVORY. Daughter, dear, do you know anything about the papers in the safe?

SUD [*excitedly*]. Everybody look away. Tremble, Inkwell — Now, Inkwell, count five — now look at Inkwell — Again, please.

IVORY. Daughter, dear, do you know anything about the papers in the safe?

SUD [*claps his hands*]. One — two — three — four — five —

IVORY. Those valuable papers!

SUD. That's it, go ahead!

MISS IVORY. I don't even know the combination, father. Could they have been stolen?

WOULDBY. Did Inkwell really take them?

SUD. He's the villain, isn't he? I couldn't let the hero do it.

IVORY. What shall I do? Where shall I look? Where, oh where?

[*Ivory goes up stage back of Miss Ivory to table and knocks off a revolver.*]

MISS IVORY. Oh! Revolvers!

RULER. Let me, sir. [*Picks them up.*]

MISS IVORY [*in terror*]. Where did they come from?

WOULDBY [*hands to ears*]. Are they going to use them?

SUD. Of course. I had to show the audience the revolvers are there, so Ivory had to knock them down.

IVORY [*is up stage. Places one revolver on table*]. I have to have these near by when a strike is on, one never knows what to expect.

RULER [*places other revolver on table*]. Even I have one in my pocket.

INKWELL [*slaps his side pocket*]. And I in mine —

MISS IVORY. Oh! dear, how dreadful! Suppose one of them should go off! Oh! Do be careful!

INKWELL [*insinuatingly*]. Have you changed your mind, Mr. Ivory? Have you decided to accept my proposition?

MISS IVORY. What is your proposition, Mr. Inkwell?

INKWELL [*goes left to Ruler*]. I believe your father wishes to discuss it with you. Mr. Ruler, will you have a smoke with me in the orangerie?

SUD [*corrects him with great disgust*]. Orangerie!!!

[*Inkwell and Ruler exeunt right.*]

MISS IVORY [*crosses right — anxiously*]. *What* does he want to know —

IVORY [*almost breaking down. Sinks into chair left of table*]. Oh! My daughter — how can I tell you — how can I — I am ruined — ruined!

[*Sud rises, and beats time in rhythm like a conductor to their "Ohs."*]

MISS IVORY [*a little up and left of table*]. *You — ruined — Oh!* —

IVORY. Oh!

MISS IVORY. Oh!

SUD [*turning to Wouldby and whispering audibly*]. When you are hard up for conversation use Oh's —

[*Sits quickly.*]

IVORY. We have lived beyond our means — Oh! — my child — I have only brought you misery —

MISS IVORY [*goes to father, stands back of his chair and caresses him*]. Poor father — don't take it that way — I *love* you — we must live differently — anything you say —

WOULDBY [*to Sud*]. How sweet and sacrificial!

SUD [*enthusiastically*]. Ah! She's pure Ivory — a chip off the old block!

IVORY. That is not all. Inkwell represents the brick-layers; he will continue the strike unless I can buy him off.

[*Sud goes up right, to be behind them. Faces them. Follows every line in his manuscript.*]

MISS IVORY. And you can't raise the money?

IVORY. He doesn't want money. He wants to marry you! He will stop at nothing to get me into prison — any place to crush me — he has power. I have cause to fear him.

[*Ivory at right.*]

MISS IVORY [*at left. In distress*]. Oh! Oh! — How terrible — how terrible — what am I to say! Oh — father — and I can save you? And I hesitate? Yes — yes — I will — father!

[*Rushes to Ivory's arms.*]

IVORY. Oh! My daughter! My child! My child!

MISS IVORY. Yes, father, I will, cost me what it may. I will.

[*She reads last line flatly.*]

SUD. Miss Ivory! Show some feeling! Think how you feel when you read those lines!

MISS IVORY. I know how I feel [*impudently. Then with some feeling.*] Yes, father, I will. Cost me what it may, I will, Mr. Inkwell!

SUD. Abandonment, Miss Ivory — abandonment —

MISS IVORY [*nods intelligently*]. Mr. Inkwell! Mr. Ink — we — all — !

IVORY [*rushing after Miss Ivory*]. Wait — think — consider —

[*Inkwell and Ruler enter right.*]

INKWELL [*takes her hand*]. Ah, My dear!

IVORY [*with bowed head*]. Oh!

RULER [*in alarm, to Miss Ivory*]. My dear — what is it?

SUD. Now, there's your line of "what is it?" I tucked it in there.

MISS IVORY [*goes left to Mr. Ruler. Ivory is up center. Inkwell is right*]. I can't keep my promise to you — Mr. Ruler — please don't ask for an explanation.

RULER [*excited, rushing up to Mr. Ivory*]. What is it, Mr. Ivory?

IVORY [*in despair, taking Ruler's arm for support*]. Oh — I — am broken-hearted — she is going to marry Inkwell!

RULER. No! — no! — not while I live!

IVORY. It must be! Come with me — I'll tell you — alone!

RULER. Not while I live!

SUD [*excitedly*]. Mr. Ruler! Mr. Ruler! You go out too easily! Wait! I remember a precious line I cut out of one of my last year's plays. It is perfectly fresh! No novelty worn off and incontestably original! "I am coming back."

RULER [*deferentially Ruler writes the line*]. I am coming back — yes, sir. I am coming back.

SUD. There is no, "yes, sir," in it.

RULER. No, sir.

SUD. Do you wish to retire for a few minutes and commit to memory? [*Ruler repeats the line.*] Now that we are reaching the climax I want as few interruptions and references to the book as possible —

RULER. I think I have it. [*All resume former positions. Sud climbs on his stool.*] Cue please, Mr. Ivory.

IVORY [*drags Ruler across to go out right*]. Come with me — I'll tell you! — alone!

RULER. Not while I live! I am coming back! I am coming back!!! — I am coming back!

[*Exeunt Ivory and Ruler right. Sud tiptoes up center to make sure Mrs. Pencil is ready for her cue.*]

INKWELL [*to Miss Ivory*]. Now that they have left us alone — my darling — let me tell you how I have waited for this moment —

MISS IVORY [*in despair and tears she tries to rush by to right, but he catches her*]. No, let me pass — now, now. I have said yes, let it go at that — I cannot talk now — not now —

[*Exit right weeping.*]

MRS. PENCIL [*in fury of jealousy opens door and enters in rage*]. Coward! Villain! — I have been listening behind that door — all your false vows to me!

INKWELL [*he tries to choke her*]. Don't yell so!

MRS. PENCIL [*in ordinary tone*]. I will yell!

SUD [*delighted*]. Of course, she will! Shriek good, Mrs. Pencil.

MRS. PENCIL [*shrieks*]. Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah!

INKWELL [*they struggle. Grabs Mrs. Pencil to put his hand over her mouth*]. Stop — ! Stop!

SUD. Tussle! Tussle! The audience loves it!

[*They fight.*]

WOULDBY. But what did Inkwell do?

SUD [*talks fast over shoulder to Wouldby like a man in a fast auto talks to another passing*]. Can't you tell. Haven't decided yet! Explanation in last act. No time now. Reaching climax of play. Keep it up! Keep it up!

MRS. PENCIL [*yelling*]. Oh! The treachery — perjury — You are not fit to live! I'll have my revenge — Revenge! Bing! Bang! [*She grabs revolver from table and shoots Inkwell. He falls back and obligingly lies upon the table.*] I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!

MISS IVORY [*having heard the shot and shrieks, runs in from the wing*]. Oh — who's hurt?

MRS. PENCIL [*turning and aiming re-*

volver at Miss Ivory]. Don't come near him or I'll shoot you!

RULER [*enters from right*]. What's the matter?

MISS IVORY [*screams at Ruler*]. *Don't* move or she'll shoot *you.*

RULER [*taking a revolver out of his pocket aims it at Mrs. Pencil*]. Harm her and I'll shoot *you!*

INKWELL [*who has come to in the meantime, manages to get his own revolver out of his pocket, he half raises himself from his lying position on the table and aims at Ruler, crying hoarsely*]. You thought you could be my rival — the girl said she would be mine! If you shoot the woman she'll kill the girl. I'm going to save the girl. Shoot and I'll kill *YOU!*

MR. IVORY [*he enters from right and, hearing these desperate words — takes revolver from his pocket and aims at Inkwell! Screams in fear and rage*]. Stop! Save him or I'll shoot to kill! I'll shoot to kill! I'll shoot to kill!

WOULDBY [*thrilled and excited, cries out*]. Who shoots?

SUD [*overcome with sudden realization, jumps up, grabs his forehead*]. My God! It's a deadlock!!! I don't know who shoots!

OTHERS. Oh! Shoot the *AUTHOR!!*

[*Curtain.*]

ENTER THE HERO

A Comedy

By Theresa Helburn

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ENTER THE HERO was first produced in San Francisco by the St. Francis Little Theater Players, on January 16th, 1918, with the following cast:

RUTH CAREY.....*Ruth Hammond.*
ANNE CAREY.....*Helene Sullivan.*
HAROLD LAWSON.....*Arthur Maitland.*
MRS. CAREY.....*Julia Deane.*

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ENTER THE HERO

A Comedy

By Theresa Helburn

[The Scene *presents an upstairs sitting room in a comfortable house in a small city. The wall on the spectator's left is broken by a fireplace, and beyond that a door leading into the hall. At the back of the stage is a deep bay window from which one may have a view up and down the street. A door in the right wall leads to Anne Carey's bedroom. The sitting room, being Anne's particular property, is femininely furnished in chintz. A table desk with several drawers occupies an important place in the room, which is conspicuously rich in flowers.*

The curtain rises on an empty stage. Ruth Carey, a pretty girl of eighteen years, enters hurriedly, carrying a large box; she wears a hat and coat.]

Ruth. Oh, Anne, here's *another* box of flowers! Anne, where are you?

Voice From Anne's Bedroom. In here. I thought you had gone out.

Ruth [*opening door left*]. I was just going when the expressman left these — and I wanted to see them. [*Looking into the bedroom.*] Oh, how pretty your dress is. Turn round. Just adorable! May I open these?

The Voice. Yes, but hurry. It's late.

Ruth [*throwing her sister a kiss*]. You dear! It's almost like having a fiancé of my own. Three boxes in two days! He's adorably extravagant. Oh, Anne, exquisite white roses! Come, look!

[*Anne Carey appears in the bedroom door. She is a girl of twenty-two. Her manner in this scene shows nervousness and suppressed excitement.*]

Anne. Yes, lovely. Get a bowl, Ruth. Quickly.

Ruth. I will. Here's a card. [*She hands Anne an envelope, goes to the door, then stops.*] What does he say, Anne? May I see?

[*Anne, who has read the card quickly with a curious little smile, hands it back to her without turning.*]

Ruth [*reading*]:

"The red rose whispers of passion
And the white rose breathes of love;
Oh, the red rose is a falcon,
And the white rose is a dove.

"But I send you a cream-white rosebud
With a flush on its petal tips,
For the love that is purest and sweetest
Has a kiss of desire on the lips."

Oh, how beautiful! Did he make that up, do you suppose? I didn't know he was a real poet.

Anne [*who has been pinning some of the roses on her dress*]. Any one in love is a poet.

Ruth. It's perfectly beautiful! [*She takes a pencil and little notebook out of her pocket.*] May I copy it in my "Harold Notebook"?

Anne. Your *what?*

Ruth. I call it my "Harold Notebook." I've put down bits of his letters that you read me, the lovely bits that are too beautiful to forget. Do you mind?

Anne. You silly child!

Ruth. Here, you may see it. . . . That's from the second letter he wrote you from Rio Janeiro. I just couldn't get over that letter. You know I made you read it to me three times. It was so — so delicate. I remembered this passage — see. "A young girl seems to me as exquisite and frail as a flower, and I feel myself a vandal in desiring to pluck and possess one. Yet, Anne, your face is always before me, and I know now what I was too stupid to realize before,

that it was you and you only, who made life bearable for me last winter when I was a stranger and alone." Oh, Anne — [*Sighing rapturously.*] that's the sort of love letters I've dreamed of getting. I don't suppose I ever shall.

ANNE *still looking over the notebook with her odd smile*]. Have you shown this to any one?

RUTH. Only to Caroline — in confidence. [*Pauses to see how Anne will take it.*] But really, Anne, every one knows about Harold. You've told Madge and Eleanor, and I'm sure they've told the others. They don't say anything to us, but they do to Caroline and she tells me. [*Watching Anne's face.*] You're not angry, are you, Anne?

ANNE. Yes, rather. [*Then eagerly.*] What do they say?

RUTH. Oh, all sorts of things. Some of them horrid, of course! You can't blame them for being jealous. Here you are having just the sort of experience that any one of them would give their eye teeth to have. *I'd* be jealous if you weren't my sister. As it is, I seem to get some of the glory myself.

ANNE [*pleads, but disparaging*]. But every girl has this experience sooner or later.

RUTH. Oh, not in this way. Everything that Harold does is beautiful, ideal. Jane Fenwick showed me some of Bob's letters. They were so dull, so prosaic! All about his salary and the corn crop. I was disgusted with them. So was she, I think, when she saw Harold's letters.

ANNE. Oh, you showed them to Jane, too?

RUTH [*a bit frightened*]. No, really I didn't. Caroline did. I lent her my notebook once overnight, and she gave Jane a peek — in the *strictest* confidence. Jane really needed it. She was getting so cocky about Bob. Girls are funny things, aren't they?

ANNE [*who has been keenly interested in all of Ruth's gossip*]. What do you mean?

RUTH. It isn't so much the man, as the idea of a man — some one to dream about, and to talk about. When I think of getting engaged — I suppose I shall get engaged some day — I never think of being really, really kissed by a man —

ANNE. What do you think of?

RUTH. I always think of telling Caroline about it, showing my ring to her and to Madge. Oh, Madge is green with envy. I believe she thought Harold sort of liked her. [*Anne turns away.*] She was so excited when she saw him in New York. She said she would have got off the bus and chased him, but he went into a house. . . . Anne, why didn't you tell us — me, at least — that Harold was back from South America, before we heard it from Madge?

ANNE. Just because . . . I wanted to avoid all this . . . It was hard enough to have him within a few hours' distance and know he could not get to me. But it was easier when no one else knew. Don't you understand?

RUTH. Yes, dear, of course I do — but still —

ANNE [*impatiently*]. Now, Ruth, it's quarter past four. You promised —

RUTH. I'm going . . . right straight off . . . unless — Oh, Anne, mayn't I stay and have just one peek. I won't let him see me, and then I'll run straight away?

ANNE. Oh, for heaven's sake, don't be naughty and silly! Clear out now, quickly, or — [*Changing her tone suddenly.*] Ruth, dear, put yourself in my place. Think how you would feel if you were going to see the man you loved for the first time. That's what it really is. Think of it! Two years ago when he went away we were just the merest friends — and now —

RUTH. And now you're engaged to be married! Oh, isn't it the most romantic thing! Of course you want to be alone. Forgive me. Oh, Anne, how excited you must be!

ANNE [*with rather histrionic intensity*]. No, I'm strangely calm. And yet, Ruth, I'm afraid, terribly afraid.

RUTH. Why, what of?

ANNE [*acting*]. I don't know . . . of everything . . . of the unknown. All this has been so wonderful, if anything should happen I don't think I could bear it. I think I should die.

RUTH. Nonsense, dear, what can happen? You're just on edge. Well, I'll be off. I'll join Mother at Aunt Nellie's. Give my love to Harold. You know I've

never called him anything but Mr. Lawson to his face. Isn't that funny? Good-by, dear. [*Throwing Anne a kiss.*] You look so sweet.

ANNE [*her hands on Ruth's shoulders for an impressive moment*]. Good-by, Ruth. Good-by.

[*They kiss. Ruth goes. Left alone, a complete change comes over Anne. She drops the romantic attitude. She is nervously determined. She quickly arranges the flowers, takes out the box, etc., straightens the room, and surveys herself rapidly in the mirror. There is a sound of wheels outside. Anne goes to the bay window and looks out. Then she stands erect in the grip of an emotion that is more like terror than anticipation. Hearing the sound of footsteps on the stair she is panic-stricken and about to bolt, but at the sound of voices she pulls herself together and stands motionless.*]

MAN'S VOICE [*outside*]. In here? All right!

[*Harold Lawson enters, a well set up, bronzed, rather commonplace young man of about twenty-eight. He sees no one on his entry, but as he advances into the room, Anne comes down from the bay window.*]

HAROLD. Hello, Miss Carey, how are you? Splendid to see you again, after all this time. [*Anne looks at him without speaking, which slightly embarrasses him.*] You're looking fine. How's your mother — and little Ruth?

ANNE [*slowly*]. Welcome home.

HAROLD. Oh, thanks. It's rather nice to be back in God's country. But it's not for long this time.

ANNE. Are you going away again?

HAROLD. Yes. I've another appointment. This one in India, some big salt mines. Not bad, eh? I made pretty good in Brazil, they tell me.

ANNE [*nervously*]. Sit down.

HAROLD. Thanks. Hot for September, isn't it? Though I ought to be used to heat by this time. Sometimes the thermometer would run a hundred and eight for a week on end. Not much fun, that.

ANNE. No, indeed.

HAROLD [*settling back comfortably to talk about himself*]. You know I loathed it down there at first. What with all the foreigners and the rotten weather and the bugs — thought I'd never get into the swing. Wanted to chuck engineering for any old job that was cool, but after a while —

ANNE. How long have you been home?

HAROLD. About three weeks. I'd really been meaning to come out here and have a look round my old haunts, but there was business in New York, and I had to go South and see my family — you know how time flies. Then your note came. It was mighty jolly of you to ask me out here. By the way, how did you know I was back?

ANNE [*after a pause*]. Madge Kennedy caught sight of you in New York.

HAROLD. Did she really? How is little Madge? And that odd brother of hers. Is he just as much of a fool as ever? I remember once he said to me —

ANNE. Oh, I didn't ask you here to talk about Madge Kennedy's family.

HAROLD [*taken aback*]. No . . . no, of course, not. I — I've been wondering just why you did ask me. You said you wanted to talk to me about something.

ANNE [*gently*]. Weren't you glad to come?

HAROLD. Why, of course I was. Of course. And then your note fired my curiosity — your asking me to come straight to you before seeing any one else.

ANNE. Aren't you glad to be here with me?

HAROLD. Why surely, of course, but — [*Pause.*]

ANNE. You see, people seemed to expect you would come to see me first of all. I rather expected it myself. Don't you understand?

HAROLD [*very uncomfortably*]. No . . . I'm afraid I don't . . .

ANNE. From the way you acted before you went away I thought you, yourself, would want to see me first of all.

HAROLD. Before I went away? What do you mean?

ANNE. You know well enough what I mean. The parties those last weeks — the theater we went to — the beautiful flowers you sent Mother — the letter —

HAROLD. But — but — why, I was going away. You and your people had

been awfully nice to me, a perfect stranger in town. I was simply trying ot do the decent thing. Good Lord! You don't mean to say you thought —

ANNE [*watching him very closely*]. Yes, it's true, I thought — and every one else thought — I've been waiting these two years for you to come back.

[*She drops her face into her hands. Her shoulders shake.*]

HAROLD [*jumping up*]. Great Heavens! I never imagined — Why, Miss Carey, I — oh, I'm terribly sorry! [*She continues to sob.*] Please don't do that — please! I'd better go away — I'll clear out — I'll go straight off to India — I'll never bother you again.

[*He seized his hat, and is making, in a bewildered way, for the door, when she intercepts him.*]

ANNE. No. You mustn't go away!

HAROLD. But what can I do?

ANNE [*striking a tragic attitude*]. You mean to say you don't care at all — that you have never cared?

HAROLD. Really, Miss Carey, I —

ANNE. For heaven't sake, don't call me Miss Carey. Call me Anne.

HAROLD. Miss Carey . . . Anne . . . I . . . Oh, you'd better let me go — let me get away before any one knows I'm here — before they think —

ANNE. It's too late. They think already.

HAROLD. Think what? What do you mean?

ANNE. Oh, this is terrible! Sit down, Harold, and listen to me. [*She pushes him into a chair and begins to talk very rapidly, watching intently the effect of her words upon him.*] You see, when you went away, people began to say things about us — you and me — about your caring. I let them go on. In fact I believed them. I suppose it was because I wanted so much to believe them. Oh, what a fool I've been! What a fool!

[*She covers her face with her hands. He gets up intending vaguely to comfort her, but she thinks he is making another move to go, and jumps to her feet.*]

ANNE. And now you want to clear out like a thief in the night, and leave me to be laughed at! No, no, you can't do that! You must help me. You've hurt me to the very soul. You mustn't humiliate me before the world.

HAROLD. I'll do anything I can, Miss Carey.

ANNE. Anne!

HAROLD. Anne, I mean. But how?

ANNE [*after a moment's thought, as if the idea had just come to her*]. You must stay here. You must pretend for a few days — for a week at most, that we're engaged.

HAROLD. I can't do that, you know. Really, I can't.

ANNE [*going to him*]. Why not? Only a little while. Then you'll go away to India. We'll find it's been a mistake. I'll break it off,— it will only be a pretense, of course, but at least no one will know what a fool I've been.

HAROLD [*after a moment's hesitation*]. Miss Carey — Anne, I mean, I'll do anything I can, but not that! A man can't do that. You see, there's a girl, an English girl, down in Brazil, I —

ANNE. Oh, a girl! Another! Well, after all, what does that matter? Brazil is a long way off. She need never know.

HAROLD. She might hear. You can't keep things like this hid. No. I wouldn't risk that. You'd better let me clear out before your family gets home. No one need ever know I've been here.

[*Again he makes a move toward the door. Anne stands motionless.*]

ANNE. You can't go. You can't. It's more serious than you imagine.

HAROLD. Serious? What do you mean?

ANNE. Come here. [*He obeys. She sits in a big chair, but avoids looking at him. There is a delicate imitation of a tragic actress in the way she tells her story.*] I wonder if I can make you understand? It means so much to me that you should — so much! Harold, you know how dull life is here in this little town. You were glad enough to get away after a year of it, weren't you? Well, it's worse for a girl, with nothing to do but sit at home — and dream — of you. Yes, that's what I did, until, at last, when I couldn't stand it any longer, I wrote you.

HAROLD [*quickly*]. I never got the letter, Miss Carey. Honor bright, I didn't.

ANNE. Perhaps not, but you answered it.

HAROLD. Answered it? What are you talking about?

ANNE. Would you like to see your answer? [*She goes to the desk, takes a packet of letters out of a drawer, selects one, and hands it to him.*] Here it is — your answer. You see it's post-marked Rio Janeiro.

HAROLD [*taking it wonderingly*]. This does look like my writing. [*Reads.*] "Anne, my darling —" I say, what does this mean?

ANNE. Go on.

HAROLD [*reading*]. "I have your wonderful letter. It came to me like rain in the desert. Can it be true, Anne, that you do care? I ask myself a hundred times what I have done to deserve this. A young girl seems to me as exquisite and frail as a flower —" Great Scott! You don't think *I* could have written such stuff! What in the world!

ANNE [*handing over another letter*]. Here's the next letter you wrote me, from the mine. It's a beautiful one. Read it.

HAROLD [*tears it open angrily, and reads*]. "I have been out in the night under the stars. Oh, that you were here, my beloved! It is easy to stand the dust and the turmoil of the mine without you, but beauty that I cannot share with you hurts me like a pain —"

[*He throws the letter on the table and turns toward her, speechless.*]

ANNE [*inexorably*]. Yes, that's an exceptionally beautiful one. But there are more — lots more. Would you like to see them?

HAROLD. But I tell you, I never wrote them. These aren't my letters.

ANNE. Whose are they, then?

HAROLD [*walking up and down furiously*]. God knows! This is some outrageous trick. You've been duped, you poor child. But we'll get to the bottom of this. Just leave it to me. I'll get detectives. I'll find out who's back of it! I'll —

[*He comes face to face with her and finds her looking quietly at him with something akin to critical interest.*]

HAROLD. Good Lord. What's the matter with me! You don't believe those letters. You couldn't think I wrote them, or you wouldn't have met me as you did, quite naturally, as an old friend. *You understand!* For heaven's sake, make it clear to me!

ANNE. I am trying to . . . I told you there had to be . . . answers . . . I was afraid to send my letters to you, but there had to be answers. [*Harold stares at her.*] So I wrote them myself.

HAROLD. You wrote them yourself? ! ?

ANNE. Yes.

HAROLD. These? These very letters?

ANNE. Yes. I had to.

HAROLD. Good God! [*He gazes at the litter of letters on the desk in stupefied silence.*] But the handwriting.

ANNE. Oh, that was easy. I had the letter you wrote to Mother.

HAROLD. And you learned to imitate my handwriting?

ANNE [*politely*]. It was very good writing.

HAROLD [*in sudden apprehension*]. No one has seen these things,— have they?

ANNE. They arrived by mail.

HAROLD. You mean people saw the envelopes. Yes, that's bad enough. . . . But you haven't shown them to any one? [*At her silence he turns furiously upon her.*] Have you? . . . Have you?

ANNE [*who enjoys her answer and its effect upon him*]. Only parts — never a whole letter. But it was such a pleasure to be able to talk about you to some one. My only pleasure.

HAROLD. Good heavens! You told people I wrote these letters? That we were engaged?

ANNE. I didn't mean to, Harold. Really, I didn't. But I couldn't keep it dark. There were your telegrams.

HAROLD. My telegrams? ! ?

[*She goes to desk and produces a bundle of dispatches.*]

ANNE [*brazen in her sincerity*]. You used to wire me every time you changed your address. You were very thoughtful, Harold. But, of course, I couldn't keep those secret like your letters.

HAROLD [*standing helplessly, with the telegrams loose in his fingers*]. My telegrams! Good Lord! [*He opens one and reads.*] "Leaving Rio for fortnight of inspection in interior. Address care Señor Miguel —" *My* telegrams!

[*He flings the packet violently on the table, thereby almost upsetting*

a bowl of roses which he hastens to preserve.]

ANNE. And then there were your flowers. I see you are admiring them.

[*Harold withdraws as if the flowers were charged with electricity.*]

HAROLD. What flowers?

ANNE. These — these — all of them. You sent me flowers every week while you were gone.

HAROLD [*overcome*]. Good God!

[*He has now reached the apex of his amazement and becomes sardonic.*]

ANNE. Yes. You were extravagant with flowers, Harold. Of course I love them, but I had to scold you about spending so much money.

HAROLD. Spending so much money? And what did I say when you scolded me?

ANNE [*taken aback only for a moment by his changed attitude*]. You sent me a bigger bunch than ever before — and — wait a minute — here's the card you put in it.

[*She goes to the same fatal desk and produces a package of florists' cards.*]

HAROLD. Are all those my cards too?

ANNE. Yes.

HAROLD [*laughing a bit wildly*]. I'm afraid I *was* a bit extravagant!

ANNE. Here's the one! You wrote: "If all that I have, and all that I am, is too little to lay before you, how can these poor flowers be much?"

HAROLD. I wrote that? Very pretty — very. I'd forgotten I had any such knack at sentiments.

ANNE. And then, right away, you sent me the ring.

HAROLD [*jumps, startled out of his sardonic pose*]. Ring! What ring?

ANNE. My engagement ring. You really were very extravagant that time, Harold.

HAROLD [*looking fearfully at her hands*]. But I don't see . . . You're not wearing . . .?

ANNE. Not there — here, next to my heart. [*She takes out a ring which hangs on a chain inside her frock and presses it to her lips. Looking at him deeply.*] I adore sapphires, Harold.

[*A new fear comes into Harold's eyes. He begins to humor her.*]

HAROLD. Yes. Yes. Of course. Everyone likes sapphires, Anne. It is a beauty. Yes. [*He comes very close to her, and speaks very gently, as if to a child.*] You haven't shown your ring to any one, have you, Anne?

ANNE. Only to a few people — One or two.

HAROLD. A few people! Good heavens! [*Then he controls himself, takes her hands gently in his, and continues speaking, as if to a child.*] Sit down, Anne; we must talk this over a little,— very quietly, you understand, very quietly. Now to begin with, when did you first —

ANNE [*breaks away from him with a little laugh*]. No, I'm not crazy. Don't be worried. I'm perfectly sane. I had to tell you all this to show how serious it was. Now you know. What are you going to do?

HAROLD. Do? [*He slowly straightens up as if the knowledge of her sanity had relieved him of a heavy load.*] I'm going to take the next train back to New York.

ANNE. And leave me to get out of this before people all alone?

HAROLD. You got into it without my assistance, didn't you? Great Scott, you forged those letters in cold blood —

ANNE. Not in cold blood, Harold. Remember, I cared.

HAROLD. I don't believe it. [*Accusingly.*] You enjoyed writing those letters!

ANNE. Of course I enjoyed it. It meant thinking of you, talking of —

HAROLD. Rot! Not of me, really. You didn't think I am really the sort of person who could write that — that drivel!

ANNE [*hurt*]. Oh, I don't know. After a while I suppose you and my dream got confused.

HAROLD. But it was the rankest —

ANNE. Oh, I'm not so different from other girls. We're all like that. [*Repeating Ruth's phrase reminiscently.*] We must have some one to dream about — to talk about. I suppose it's because we haven't enough to do. And then we don't have any — any real adventures like — shop girls.

HAROLD [*surprised at this bit of reality*]. That's a funny thing to say!

ANNE. Well, it's true. I know I went

rather far. After I got started I couldn't stop. I didn't want to, either. It took hold of me. So I went on and on and let people think whatever they wanted. But if you go now and people find out what I've done, they'll think I'm really mad — or something worse. Life will be impossible for me here, don't you see — impossible. [*Harold is silent.*] But if you stay, it will be so easy. Just a day or two. Then you will have to go to India. Is that much to ask? [*Acting.*] And you save me from disgrace, from ruin!

[*Harold remains silent, troubled.*]

ANNE [*becoming impassioned*]. You must help me. You *must.* After I've been so frank with you, you can't go back on me now. I've never in my life talked to any one like this — so openly. You *can't* go back on me! If you leave me here to be laughed at, mocked at by every one, I don't know what I shall do. I shan't be responsible. If you have any kindness, any chivalry . . . Oh, for God's sake, Harold, help me, help me!

[*Kneels at his feet.*]

HAROLD. I don't know . . . I'm horribly muddled . . . All right, I'll stay!

ANNE. Good! Good! Oh, you are fine! I knew you would be. Now everything will be so simple. [*The vista opens before her.*] We will be very quiet here for a couple of days. We won't see many people, for of course it isn't announced. And then you will go . . . and I will write you a letter . . .

HAROLD [*disagreeably struck by the phrase*]. Write me a letter? What for?

ANNE [*ingenuously*]. Telling you that I have been mistaken. Releasing you from the engagement . . . and you will write me an answer . . . sad but manly . . . reluctantly accepting my decision . . .

HAROLD. Oh, I am to write an answer, sad but manly — Good God! Suppose you don't release me after all.

ANNE. Don't be silly, Harold. I promise. Can't you trust me?

HAROLD. Trust you? [*His eyes travel quickly from the table littered with letters and dispatches to the flowers that ornament the room, back to the table and finally to the ring that now hangs conspicuously on her breast. She follows the look and instinctively puts her hand to the ring.*] Trust you? By Jove, no, I don't trust you! This is absurd, I don't stay another moment. Say what you will to people. I'm off. This is final.

ANNE [*who has stepped to the window*]. You can't go now. I hear Mother and Ruth coming.

HAROLD. All the more reason. [*He finds his hat.*] I bolt.

ANNE [*blocking the door*]. You can't go, Harold! Don't corner me. I'll fight like a wildcat if you do.

HAROLD. Fight?

ANNE. Yes. A pretty figure you'll cut if you bolt now. They'll think you a cad — an out and out cad! Haven't they seen your letters come week by week, and your presents? And you have written to Mother, too — I have your letter. There won't be anything bad enough to say about you. They'll say you jilted me for that English girl in Brazil. It will be true, too. And it will get about. She'll hear of it, I'll see to that — and then —

HAROLD. But it's a complete lie! I can explain —

ANNE. You'll have a hard time explaining your letters and your presents — and your ring. There's a deal of evidence against you —

HAROLD. See here, are you trying to blackmail me? Oh, this is too ridiculous!

ANNE. They're coming! I hear them on the stairs! What are you going to tell them?

HAROLD. The truth. I must get clear of all this. I tell you —

ANNE [*suddenly clinging to him*]. No, no, Harold! Forgive me, I was just testing you. I will get you out of this. Leave it to me.

HAROLD [*struggling with her*]. No, I won't leave anything to you, *ever.*

ANNE [*still clinging tightly*]. Harold, remember I am a woman — and I love you.

[*This brings him up short a moment to wonder, and in this moment there is a knock at the door.*]

ANNE [*abandoning Harold*]. Come in. [*There is a discreet pause.*]

MRS. CAREY'S VOICE [*off stage*]. May we come in?

ANNE [*angrily*]. Yes!

[*Harold, who has moved toward the door, meets Mrs. Carey as she enters. She throws her arms about his neck and kisses him warmly. She is followed by Ruth.*]

MRS. CAREY. Harold! My door boy!

RUTH [*clutching his arm*]. Hello, Harold. I am so glad.

[*Harold, temporarily overwhelmed by the onslaught of the two women, is about to speak, when Anne interrupts dramatically.*]

ANNE. Wait a moment, Mother. Before you say anything more I must tell you that Harold and I are no longer engaged!

[*Mrs. Carey and Ruth draw away from Harold in horror-struck surprise.*]

MRS. CAREY. No longer engaged? Why . . . What . . .?

HAROLD. Really, Mrs. Carey, I —

ANNE [*interrupts, going to her mother*]. Mother, dear, be patient with me, trust me, I beg of you — and please, please don't ask me any questions. Harold and I have had a very hard — a very painful hour together. I don't think I can stand any more.

[*She is visibly very much exhausted, gasping for breath.*]

MRS. CAREY. Oh, my poor child, what is it? What has he done?

[*She supports Anne on one side while Ruth hurries to the other.*]

HAROLD. Really, Mrs. Carey, I think I can explain.

ANNE. No, Harold, there's no use trying to explain. There are some things a woman feels, about which she cannot reason. I know I am doing right.

HAROLD [*desperately*]. Mrs. Carey, I assure you —

ANNE [*as if on the verge of a nervous crisis*]. Oh, please, *please,* Harold, don't protest any more. I am not blaming you. Understand, Mother, I am not blaming him. But my decision is irrevocable. I thought you understood. I beg you to go away. You have just time to catch the afternoon express.

HAROLD. Nonsense, Anne, you must let me —

ANNE [*wildly*]. No, no, Harold, it is finished! Don't you understand? Finished! [*She abandons the support of her mother and Ruth and goes to the table.*] See, here are your letters. I am going to burn them. [*She throws the packet into the fire.*] All your letters — [*She throws the dispatches into the fire.*] Don't, please, continue this unendurable situation any longer. Go, I beg of you, go!

[*She is almost hysterical.*]

HAROLD. But I tell you I must —

ANNE [*falling back in her mother's arms*]. Make him go, Mother! Make him go!

MRS. CAREY. Yes, go! Go, sir! Don't you see you are torturing the child. I insist upon your going.

RUTH. Yes, she is in a dreadful state.

[*Here Mrs. Carey and Ruth fall into simultaneous urgings.*]

HAROLD [*who has tried in vain to make himself heard*]. All right, I'm going, I give up!

[*He seizes his hat and rushes out, banging the door behind him. Anne breaks away from her mother and sister, totters rapidly to the door and calls down gently.*]

ANNE. Not in anger, I beg of you, Harold! I am not blaming you. Goodby.

[*The street door is heard to bang. Anne collapses in approved tragedy style.*]

ANNE [*gasping*]. Get some water, Ruth. I shall be all right in a moment.

[*Ruth rushes into the bedroom.*]

MRS. CAREY. Oh, my dear child, calm yourself. Mother is here, dear. She will take care of you. Tell me, dear, tell me.

[*Ruth returns with the water. Anne sips a little.*]

ANNE. I will, Mother — I will . . . everything . . . later. [*She drinks.*] But now I must be alone. Please, dear, go away . . . for a little while. I must be alone [*Rising and moving to the fire.*] with the ruin of my dreams.

[*She puts her arms on the chimney shelf and drops her head on them.*]

RUTH. Come, Mother! Come away!

MRS. CAREY. Yes, I am coming. We shall be in the next room, Annie, when you want us. Right here.

ANNE [*as they go out, raises her head and murmurs*]. Dust and ashes! Dust and ashes!

[*As soon as they have gone, Anne straightens up slowly. She pulls herself together after the physical strain of her acting. Then she looks at the watch on her wrist and sighs a long triumphant sigh. Her eye falls on the desk and she sees the package of florists' cards still there. She picks them up, returns with them to the fire and is about to throw them in, when her eye is caught by the writing on one. She takes it out and reads it. Then she takes another — and another. She stops and looks away dreamily. Then slowly, she moves back to the desk, drops the cards into a drawer and locks it. She sits brooding at the desk and the open paper before her seems to fascinate her. As if in a dream she picks up a pencil. A creative look comes into her eyes. Resting her chin on her left arm, she begins slowly to write, murmuring to herself.*]

ANNE [*reading as she writes*]. "Anne, my dearest . . . I am on the train . . . broken, shattered . . . Why have you done this to me . . . why have you darkened the sun . . . and put out the stars . . . put out the stars? . . . Give me another chance, Anne . . . I will make good . . . I promise you . . . For God's sake, Anne, don't shut me out of your life utterly . . . I cannot bear it . . . I . . ."

[*The Curtain has fallen slowly as she writes.*]

THE SHEPHERD IN THE DISTANCE

A Pantomime

By Holland Hudson

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The Shepherd in the Distance was first produced by the Washington Square Players, at the Bandbox Theatre, New York City, on the night of March 26, 1915, with the following cast:

The Princess.....*Frances Paine.*
The Attendant.....*Beatrice Savelli.*
The Shepherd.....*Robert Locher.*
The Wazir.....*Arvid Paulson.*
The Vizier.....*John Alan Houghton.*
Ghurri-Wurri [*the Beggar*].....*Harry Day.*
The Goat.....*E. J. Ballantine.*
Slaves of the Princess..... {.....*Josephine Niveson.*
.....*Edwina Behre.*
The Maker of Sounds.....*Robert Edwards.*

Produced under the direction of William Pennington. Scenes and costumes designed by Robert Locker.

PROGRAM

THE PERSONS:

The Princess.
The Attendant.
The Slaves.
The Wazir [*her guardian*].
The Vizier.
The Nubian.
The Shepherd.
The Goat.
Ghurri-Wurri.
The Maker of Sounds.

The Shepherd in the Distance is published for the first time. The editors are indebted to Mr. Holland Hudson for permission to include it in this volume. The professional and amateur stage rights on this pantomime are strictly reserved by the author. Applications for permission to produce the pantomime should be made to Frank Shay, Care Stewart & Kidd Company, Cincinnati, Ohio.

THE ACTION:

I. The Princess beholds The Shepherd in the Distance and goes in quest of him.
II. Ghurri-Wurri, enraged by the Princess' meager alms, swears vengeance.
III. He reveals her destination to the Wazir.
IV. Pursuit ensues.
V. The Princess meets The Shepherd in the Distance. Her capture is averted by the faithful Goat.
VI. The Goat's long head evolves a means of rescuing The Shepherd from the cruel Wazir.
VII. The Princess joins The Shepherd in the Distance.

THE STORY.[1]

Of the Princess, we know only that she was fair and slender as the lily, that somehow the fat and stupid Wazir became her guardian, and that he neglected her utterly and played chess eternally in the garden with his almost-equally-stupid Vizier. Is it any wonder she was bored?

One afternoon the Princess called for her ivory telescope, and, placing it to her eye, sought relief from the deadly ennui which her guardian caused. In the Distance she discerned a Shepherd, playing upon his pipe for the dancing of his favorite Goat. While he played the Princess marveled at his comeliness. She had never seen before a man so pleasing in face and person. At the end of his tune it seemed to her that the Shepherd turned and beckoned to her. She dared watch him no longer, lest her guardian observe her.

When the Wazir, the Vizier and the Nubian were deep in their afternoon siesta, the Princess stole out of the garden with her personal retinue and her small, but precious hope chests, and set forth toward the Distance.

Now on the highway between the foreground and the Distance lived a wretched and worthless beggar who had even lost his name and was called Ghurri-Wurri because he looked absolutely as miserable as that. He pretended to be blind and wore dark spectacles. The greatest affliction of his life was that his dark spectacles prevented him from inspecting the coins that fell in his palm, and he received more than his share of leaden counterfeits.

When Ghurri-Wurri observed the approach of the Princess and her retinue he reasoned from the richness of their attire that alms would be plentiful and large and he fawned and groveled before them. The Princess was generous, but she was also in haste, so bade her attendant give him the first coin that came to hand, and hurried on.

Ghurri-Wurri's rage knew no bounds. He wept, he stamped, he shook his fists, he railed, and he cursed. Then, perceiving the Princess' destination, he made haste to notify her guardian. The Wazir would not believe him at first and the beggar would have lost his head if he had not happened on the Princess' telescope and placed it in the Wazir's hand.

Gazing toward the Distance, the Wazir saw the Princess and her retinue nearing their destination. He lost his temper and did all of the undignified things which Ghurri-Wurri had done. Then, with the Vizier and the Nubian, he set forth in pursuit, forcing the reluctant Ghurri-Wurri to guide them. They ran like the wind,

[1] A synopsis for readers only.

till the beggar gasped and staggered, only to be jerked to his feet and forced on by the implacable Vizier, who was cruel as well as stupid.

Meanwhile the Princess arrived in the Distance. The Shepherd, who was as wise as he was comely, had proper regard for her rank and danced in her honor to his own piping. They had scarcely spoken to each other when the faithful Goat warned them of the furious approach of the raging Wazir. The Goat carried the Princess to a place of safety on his back while the Shepherd stayed to delay her pursuers. Of the Nubian he made short work indeed, but the Vizier overcame him with his great scimiter and they led him captive to the garden, leaving Ghurri-Wurri cursing on the sands.

Arrived at the garden, the Wazir ordered the Shepherd bound in chains and went on with his chess game. The Shepherd, in a gesture of despair, came upon the Princess' telescope and, seeking some ray of hope, gazed into the Distance. Here he saw the Princess and his faithful Goat, who, he perceived, had invented a plan for his deliverance.

Soon the Princess returned to the garden, disguised as a wandering dancer. She danced before the Wazir and pleased him so much that he bade her come nearer. She did so, and bound the Vizier's arms with a scarf, which so amused the Wazir that he laughed loud and long. Then she bound the Wazir's arms in the same manner and it was the Vizier's turn to laugh. Into their laughing mouths she thrust two poisoned pills so that in another instant they fell over, quite dead, amongst the chessmen.

The omnivorous Goat delivered the Shepherd from his chains with his strong teeth and they all returned to the Distance, where they still dwell in more-than-perfect bliss and may be discerned through an ivory telescope any fine afternoon.

CONCERNING THE SCENERY.

In the original production by The Washington Square Players, THE SHEPHERD IN THE DISTANCE was played in front of backgrounds of black velvet. The garden scene consisted of a black velvet drop about half-way between the curtain and back-wall, upon which a decorative white design merely suggesting the garden and its gate was appliquéd. This drop was made in three sections, the middle one hung on a separate set of lines so that it could be raised to show the "Distance" (as seen through the telescope) without disturbing the rest of the scene.

The "Distance" consisted of a velvet drop hung slightly behind the middle section of the garden scene, on the middle of which two large, white concentric circles were appliquéd around a circular opening about five feet in diameter. The bottom of the opening was about eighteen inches above the stage. Behind this stood a platform just large enough to hold four characters at one time. Black masking drapes were provided at both sides of the stage and behind the platform.

The Prologue, Scenes II, IV, V, the first part of Scene VII and the Epilogue were all played before a plain velvet drop hung a few feet upstage of the curtain line.

THE SHEPHERD IN THE DISTANCE has also been produced in colors very effectively by the Hollywood Community Theatre, at Hollywood, California. There is no reason why any highly decorative treatment of scenery and costuming will not enhance the production if it be well planned and consistent throughout.

IMPORTANT PROPERTIES.

The properties consist principally of a small chess table with most of the chessmen glued on, two stools, a telescope, a balloon and papier maché chain which are employed as a ball and chain, a very large Chinese crash cymbal for the stage manager's use, and such personal properties as occur in the text.

COSTUMES AND MAKE-UP.

Whatever scheme is selected for the scenery, the costumes and make-up should be consistent with it. In the original production, all of the characters but the Nubian were made up completely with clown white or "Plexo," the eyebrows and eyes outlined in black and mouths rouged but slightly. No unwhitened flesh was visible at all.

The Princess wore a white satin pseudo-Oriental costume with stiff ruffs at the collar, wrists and knees, the trousers not gathered at the ankles, a flat close-fitting turban with a number of ornaments and a hanging veil, and white slippers. In the dance in Scene VI she used a long black gauze scarf and a white one. Her attendant wore a similar costume of cheaper material, an unornamented turban and black slippers. Her slaves were also similarly garbed, in cotton, but with bulkier turbans, and baggy trousers, gathered at the ankles.

The Wazir, armed with a preposterous "corporation," wore baggy white trousers, gathered at the ankles, a sleeveless vest with wide, horizontal black-and-white stripes, a white cloak hanging from his shoulders which terminated in a large black tassel, a turban, a beard made of several lengths of black portière cord sewed to white gauze, and white pointed shoes. His bare arms were whitened, his eyebrows were short, thick and high up on his forehead, and he carried a black snuff-box.

The Vizier's white trousers were not so full as the Wazir's; his tight white vest had tight white sleeves; his cloak was shorter and without a tassel. His white turban, however, was decorated with antennæ of white milliner's wire. He affected high arching eyebrows, a long pointed nose, a drooping mustache, a disdainful mouth, carried a white wooden scimiter about four feet long with a black handle and wore bells on his pointed white shoes.

The Nubian wore black tights and shirt, black slippers and a white skull cap and breech-clout. The rest of him, excepting his eyes and mouth, which were whitened, was a symphony in burnt cork.

The Shepherd wore white, knee-length trunks, frayed at the ends, a little drapery about the upper man, slippers and a cap. His body was whitened profusely and he carried a tiny flute.

The Goat wore a white furry skin, horns, and foot and hand coverings resembling hoofs. His make-up approached the animal's face as nearly as possible.

Ghurri-Wurri wore tattered white baggy trousers, vest and cloak, a turban and black goggles.

The Maker of Sounds was garbed in an all-enveloping white burnous and a white skull cap.

A FEW STAGE DIRECTIONS.

Left and right, in this text, refer to the actor's, not the spectator's, point of view. The action of the piece is meant to be two-dimensional; the actors are to perform in profile as far as possible; except when registry of facial expression is important the action should be parallel with the back drop.

The entire action must be rhythmical and the rhythms should be used as definite themes, one for the Princess and her retinue, another for the Wazir, etc. The performance should be extremely rapid and must never drag. The cast should direct special attention to the comic features, and the director to the pictorial elements of the piece. The director may consider the performance as an animated poster which moves rapidly from design to design.

THE SHEPHERD IN THE DISTANCE

A Pantomime

By Holland Hudson

PROLOGUE.

[*The curtain rises on a plain drop curtain. The Maker of Sounds enters with his arms full of instruments, crosses the scene and sits with his back against one side of the proscenium, outside the curtain line. He tries out all his instruments, wind, string, percussion and "traps." He yawns. He becomes impatient and raps on the stage.*]

Cymbal Crash	The lights go out
	The drop is lifted in the darkness
Cymbal Crash	The lights are turned on

SCENE I.

[*The Wazir's garden. Discovered left to right, the Nubian, standing with folded arms, the Vizier, seated at the chess table, playing with the Wazir. At the other side of the stage, the Princess, her attendant, her two slaves. All stand motionless until set in action by the Maker of Sounds.*]

The Music	*The Pantomime, etc.*
Tap — on Chinese wood block	*Nubian* unfolds his arms
Tap	He salaams
Tap	Resumes original pose
Tap	*Vizier* moves a chessman
Tap	*Wazir* moves a chessman
Tap	*Vizier* moves a chessman
Tap	*Wazir* picks up snuff-pox
Tap	Opens it
Tap	Offers Vizier snuff
Tap	*Vizier* takes a pinch
Sand blocks	Sniffs it
Drum crash	*Vizier* sneezes
Drum crash	Sneezes again
No sound	Sneezes again
	Nubian sneezes synchronously with Vizier's paroxysms
Tap	*Vizier* returns snuff-box
Tap	*Wazir* puts it away
Bell	*Princess* yawns
Tap	Signals her attendant
Tap	*Attendant* picks up telescope
Tap	Hands it to Princess

The Music	*The Pantomime, etc.*
Wind instrument	*Princess* uses telescope
	[The middle portion of the back drop is lifted to show the "Distance" in which the *Shepherd* is discovered piping for the *Goat's* dancing.]
Stringed instrument	*The Shepherd* sees the Princess, stops piping, and declares his adoration across the distance. He beckons her to join him.
	Princess promises to do so.
	[The lifted portion of the drop is lowered again. The "Distance" vanishes.]
Tap	*Princess* signals to her retinue
Tap	*Attendant* relays the signal
Tap	*Slaves* stoop.
Tap	Lift the hope chests to their shoulders
Bass chord on stringed instrument	*Princess and retinue* take one step downstage
Treble chord	All lean forward, watching Wazir
Drum crash	*Wazir* and *Vizier* stand up
Drum crash	They glare at Princess
Tap on wood block	They sit
Bass chord	*Vizier* yawns
Bass chord	*Wazir* yawns
Bass chord	*Nubian* yawns
Bass chord	*Vizier* nods
Bass chord	*Wazir* nods
Bass chord	*Nubian* drops on one knee
Treble chord	*Princess and retinue* lean forward
Bass chord	They take one step
	[A continuation of this business takes them off at the left]
	The lights go out
Cymbal crash	[In the darkness. *Princess and retinue* cross to right of stage, ready for Scene II]
	The plain drop is lowered
Cymbal crash	The lights come up

SCENE II.

Tambourine jingles	*Ghurri-Wurri* discovered above at center, with his dark glasses pushed up on his forehead, counting his money.
Tap on piece of crockery	He finds a bad coin
Sand blocks	Bites it
Tap crockery	Throws it away
Begins the Princess rhythms on Chinese wood block	Hears the *Princess and retinue* approaching
[Telegraphically expressed it is ... ... Musically, accented triplets, common time, *presto*]	He pulls glasses over his eyes
	He grovels
Princess rhythm continues	*Princess and retinue* enter from the right
	They pass by Ghurri-Wurri without pause
Drum crash	*Ghurri-Wurri* runs ahead and prostrates himself before the Princess

The Music	*The Pantomime, etc.*
Tap	*Princess' retinue* halts
Tap	*Princess* signals to attendant
Tap	*Attendant* signals to nearest slave
Tap	*Slave* proffers chest
Tap, Tap, Tap	*Attendant* opens it, takes coin, closes it
Tap	Gives coin to Princess
Tap on crockery	*Princess* drops coin in beggar's hand
Princess rhythm	*Princess and retinue* exit at the left
Begin drum roll *pp. cresc. to ff.*	*Ghurri-Wurri* looks at coin, scrambles to his feet, looks after Princess, shakes his fists, starts to the right, turns, shakes his fist again, exits at right, raging
Cymbal crash	Lights out
	In the darkness Ghurri-Wurri crosses to left of stage, ready for Scene III
	The drop is lifted
Cymbal crash	Lights up

SCENE III.

[The Wazir's Garden as in Scene I]

Bass chords	*Wazir, Vizier* and *Nubian* asleep as before
Tap on drum	*Ghurri-Wurri* enters at the left
Tap on drum	Prostrates himself before Wazir
Bass chord	*Wazir and court* sleep on
Tap on drum	*Ghurri-Wurri* again prostrates himself
Bass chord	*The Court* sleeps on
Drum crash	*Ghurri-Wurri* slams himself down hard
Drum crash	*Wazir, Vivier, Nubian* awake
Drum roll	*Wazir* shakes his fist at the beggar
Wood-block tap	Signals Vizier
Sand blocks	*Vizier* runs thumb along his scimiter blade
Tap	*Ghurri-Wurri* retreats to the right
Tap	He stumbles over the telescope
Tap, tap	He picks it up and hands it to the Wazir
Tap	*Ghurri-Wurri* points to the "Distance."
Tap	*The Wazir* uses the telescope
Princess rhythm	The "Distance" is revealed as in Scene I
	Princess and retinue are seen traveling [across the platform from right to left]
Tap	*The Wazir* lowers the telescope
	The "Distance" vanishes as in Scene I
Drum crash	*Wazir* stamps his foot
Drum roll	He shakes his fists, first at the distance, then off left
Tap	Points at Ghurri-Wurri
Tap	*Vizier* seizes Ghurri-Wurri by the scruff of the neck
Tap	*Vizier* points off left with his scimiter
Wazir rhythm on wood-drum. [Telegraphically stated . . . . . etc. Musically, accented eighth notes in 2/4 time, *presto*]	*The Court and Ghurri-Wurri* begin to run, *Nubian* first, then *Ghurri-Wurri,* then *Vizier,* then *Wazir.* The running is entirely vertical in movement, no ground being covered at all.
	Lights out
	[In the darkness, the runners move downstage without losing step. A plain drop is lowered behind them]
Cymbal crash	
Cymbal crash	Lights on

SCENE IV.

The Music	*The Pantomime, etc.*
Wazir rhythm, *crescendo* and *accelerando*	The runners increase their speed throughout the scene
	Ghurri-Wurri slips to his knees,
	Vizier, without losing a step, jerks him back on his feet
	Ghurri-Wurri, pointing left, resumes running
	Wazir points left
	When the runners have reached their maximum speed
Cymbal crash	The lights go out
	In the darkness the *Wazir's court* and *Ghurri-Wurri* exit and take their places at the right ready for Scene V
	The Shepherd and *Goat* take their places
Cymbal crash	Lights up

SCENE V.

Wind instrument	[A plain drop]
	The Shepherd is discovered well to the left, piping for the Goat
	Goat is dancing
Begin Princess rhythm	*Goat* stops to listen, looks off to the right
	Shepherd looks to the right
	Goat crosses to extreme right, bows
	Princess and retinue enter
Tap	They halt
Tap	*The Shepherd* kneels to the Princess, then dances for her
Stringed instrument	
Drum roll *pp. crescendo*	*The Goat* becomes alarmed
	All turn and look to the right
	Goat, on all fours, offers his back to the Princess
	Shepherd induces
	Princess to sit on Goat's back
Princess rhythm	*Goat* exits, followed by Princess and retinue
Tap	*Shepherd* folds his arms
Wazir rhythm	*Wazir's Court* and *Ghurri-Wurri* enter from the right
Tap	They halt
Tap	*Wazir* points to Shepherd
Tap	*Vizier* brandishes his scimiter
Drum roll	*Nubian* approaches Shepherd
Drum crash	*Nubian* falls
Drum roll	*Wazir* shakes his fists
Crescendo to	Points at Shepherd
	Vizier attacks Shepherd with scimiter
	Shepherd grasps scimiter
	They struggle, conventionally, one, two, three, four, five, six
Drum crash	*The Shepherd* falls
Drum roll	*The Vizier* waves his scimiter aloft
Drum roll	*Wazir* exults
Tap	*Nubian* rises
Tap	*Wazir* points to the right
Tap	*Vizier* points at Shepherd with scimiter
Tap	*Nubian* seizes the Shepherd

The Music	*The Pantomime, etc.*
Wazir rhythm	*Wazir's Court* and *Shepherd* exit at the right, ignoring Ghurri-Wurri, Nubian and Shepherd first, then Vizier, then Wazir. [All cross behind the drop to left of stage ready for Scene VI]
Drum crash	*Ghurri-Wurri* stamps his foot
Drum roll	Shakes his fists after them
Drum roll	Runs to left and shakes his fists at the Princess
Drum roll	Runs to right and shakes them at the Wazir
	Runs to center and shakes them at the audience
Cymbal crash	Lights out
	Ghurri-Wurri exits
	The drop is raised
Cymbal crash	Lights on

SCENE VI.

[The Wazir's garden. No characters on scene]

Wazir rhythm	*Nubian* enters from left, holding the Shepherd
	The *Wazir* and *Vizier* follow
Tap	*Wazir* takes his seat, smirking
Tap	*Wazir* orders Shepherd thrown down at the right
Drum crash	*Nubian* complies
Tap	*Vizier* orders Nubian off right
Wazir rhythm, fast	*Nubian* hurries out
Wazir rhythm, slow	Reënters, staggering under a ball and chain [the chain of papier maché and the ball a balloon]
Drum crash	Drops these beside the Shepherd
Clank, clank	Rivets chain to Shepherd's leg
Tap	Rises
Tap	*Vizier* orders Nubian off, left
Wazir rhythm	*Nubian* exits left
Tap	*Vizier* sits
Tap	*Wazir* moves a chessman
Tap	*Vizier* moves a chessman
Tap	*Shepherd*, in a gesture of despair, finds the telescope
	He looks into the "Distance"
	[The "Distance" is shown as in Scene I]
Stringed music	*Princess* and *Goat* discovered in conference. Goat has an idea. He points to the Shepherd, then to the Wazir, then to the Princess and executes an ancient dance movement which is contemporaneously described as the "shimmy"
	The Princess claps her hands and exits, followed by the Goat
Tap	*Shepherd* lowers the telescope
	[The "Distance" vanishes]
Tap	*Shepherd* is puzzled
Stringed music	*Princess* enters from the left, veiled and carrying a scarf in her hands
	Goat enters with her, goes at once to the Shepherd
	Princess poses at center
	Wazir and *Vizier* turn, smirking
	Princess dances
	Wazir leers and strokes his beard
	Princess ends dance beside Vizier
Chords, agitato	She ties his arms with her scarf

The Music	*The Pantomime, etc.*
Sand blocks	*Wazir* is convulsed with laughter
Chords	*Princess* binds Wazir's arms with her veil
Sand blocks	*Vizier* is convulsed with laughter
Princess rhythm on wood drum	*The Attendant* enters from the left with a box on which a skull and cross-bones are conspicuous
Tap	*Princess* takes two pills from the box
Tap	She pops them into her prisoners' open mouths
Princess rhythm	*The Attendant* exits as she came
Sand blocks	*Wazir* and *Vizier* swallow vigorously
Drum crash	They lay their heads upon the chess table and die
Tap	*Princess* beckons to the Shepherd
Tap	*Shepherd* points to his fetters
Tap	*Goat* attacks the ball and chain
Drum crash	He "bites" the ball [bursts the balloon]
Tap	He "bites" the chain.
String music	*Princess, Shepherd* and *Goat* dance in a circle
Cymbal crash	Lights out
	Princess and *Shepherd* and *Goat* ready at left for next scene
	The drop is lowered
Cymbal crash	Lights up

SCENE VII.

String music	*Princess* and *Shepherd* dance across followed by the *Goat,* who is playing on the Shepherd's pipe
	Princess and *Shepherd,* behind the drop take their places on the platform
Cymbal crash	Lights out
	[The drop is lifted]
Cymbal crash	Lights on
	[The Wazir's garden with the middle section of the drop lifted to show the "Distance"]
String music	*Shepherd* and *Princess* discovered in the "Distance" posed in a kiss
Cymbal crash	Lights out
	[The drop is lowered]
Cymbal crash	Lights on
	The Maker of Sounds rises, yawns cavernously, bows very slightly and exits

[*Curtain.*]

BOCCACCIO'S UNTOLD TALE

A Play

By Harry Kemp

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PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

Florio [*a poet*].
Olivia [*Florio's mistress*].
Violante [*a Florentine noblewoman*].
Lizzia [*Florio's serving-woman*].
Dioneo [*a member of Boccaccio's party*].
One Voice.
Another Voice.
Various Processions Bearing the Dead.

Time: *The year of the Great Plague, A. D. 1348.*
Place: *Florence.*

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BOCCACCIO'S UNTOLD TALE

A Play

By Harry Kemp

[Scene: *A lower room in Florio's house. It is wide and simply furnished.*

In the center, at back, is a large doorway, hung with great black arras. In the right-hand extreme corner is a small altar to the Virgin.

In wall, at back, high up on left, a small window.

A smaller doorway, hung with arras of black, is on the left, well toward the front. This doorway gives on the study of the poet.

At rise of curtain the stage is lit with the uncertain light of tapers.

Lizzia, the old servant, is discovered kneeling at the altar.

Soon she rises, crossing herself devoutly.

Demurringly and with deprecating shakes of the head, she begins hanging wreaths about the walls of the room.

After the hanging of each wreath she crosses herself, and, with agitated piety verging on superstition, she bends the knee briefly before altar.

Now the wreaths are all in place. . . . Through the small window the grayness that comes before dawn begins to glimmer in.

One by one Lizzia snuffs out the tapers.

For a moment everything is left in the gray half-darkness.

But now Lizzia draws aside the large black arras in the back. There is revealed a magnificent panoramic view of medieval Florence, flushing gradually from pearl-gray to soft, delicate rose, then to the full gold of accomplished sunrise.

Again the old woman kneels at the altar.

Enter, through the open doorway at back, Violante — rather tall, good-looking, quite dark.

Violante stands silent for a moment. One can see that it is in her thought to wait till Lizzia finishes her devotions . . . then she becomes impatient and breaks in on them.]

Violante

Lizzia, where bides your master, Florio?
I sped a servant hither yesterday,
To bid him come to me, and now, this morning,
I come myself.

Lizzia

For three days he has looked upon no one.
Even I, who wait upon him, have not seen him.

Violante

Where keeps he, then?

Lizzia [*indicating the small doorway*].

Yonder, within that arras.

Violante

Summon him forth!
Say the Lady Violante waits his presence.

Lizzia

He will grow wroth with me — nor will he greet you.

Violante

Fears he, then, the Plague so? Is he too such
As dare not walk abroad nor breathe the air
Lest he should drink infection?

Lizzia

Not so, Lady, but he —

Violante

Tell him, then,
Our friend Boccaccio, the story-teller,

Has shaped a brave device against the Plague. . . .
Before the sun climbs higher into day
And the night's Dead are heaped up in the streets
For buriers and priests to draw away,
A group of goodly ladies and gentlemen
Go forth to a sequestered country place
Remote from Florence and invisible Death.
There, in green gardens full of birds and leaves,
The blue, cloud-wandering heaven spread above,
We shall beguile the time with merriment,
Music and song and telling of many tales,
Trusting that Death, glutted with multitudes,
Will pass us by. . . . We need but Florio
To bring our perfect pleasure to the brim.

LIZZIA [*obstinately*]

But he will see no one, Lady, not even you.
He is — he is —

VIOLANTE

Not smitten by the Plague?

LIZZIA [*hesitating*]

Nay, he has taken a vow of close seclusion

VIOLANTE [*confidently*]

But he knows not I am here — the Lady Violante! [*A pause.*]
[*Impetuously*] Go, tell him it is I,—
Nor take upon yourself such high command!

LIZZIA [*somewhat resentfully*]

I am a servant,
I only do as he commanded me. . . . [*Barring way.*]

VIOLANTE [*distractedly*]

Strange that he should so change in ten days' space.
[*With passionate abandonment*]
Old woman, go this instant — summon him!
I will abide your crabbed ways no longer.

LIZZIA [*stung to retaliation*]

Lady, he would not look upon your face
If you made him ruler of the world for it.

VIOLANTE [*flaming*]

What new freak of his is this?
He is as full of moods as any woman. . . .
But I had never thought —
[*Determined*]
I will go to him!

LIZZIA [*again barring way*]

I could tell you many things,
But I would spare you.

VIOLANTE

Spare me! . . . you insolent, presumptuous old woman,
What have I,
I, the Lady Violante Ugolini,
To do with your good master, Florio,
Beyond a fostering friendship for his song!
Else he were nothing to me. . . .
You are presuming on your age and service —
He shall rebuke you for this. . . .

LIZZIA

Very well, Lady, if you must know —
He has sworn that he will look upon no one
Till he behold — Olivia!

VIOLANTE [*startled*]

Olivia! . . . who is Olivia?

LIZZIA

She is a girl who came from Padua
Hither, to flee the Plague . . . and fled in vain.
He has loved her just ten days . . . since first she came. . . .
She came to him, a stranger, singing songs —
His songs!

VIOLANTE

And flattering him so — he loved her!

LIZZIA

Nay, she was beautiful, my noble lady,—
Surpassing wonderful. . . . "His shining dream
Of ivory and gold," he called her. . . .

VIOLANTE [*coldly*]

What has all this to do with me?

[*Relapsing into forgetful eagerness.*]
Tell me, where, then, is his Olivia now?

LIZZIA

The Plague! He gave her to a doctor's care,
Beggaring himself therefor, as one who loves!

VIOLANTE

And now he shuts himself away for grief
Because she died! . . . But, if she be dead,
Wherefore these garlands? —
Or does he think she will come back, alive?

LIZZIA

The learned doctor swears if she survives
Three days, she shall not die.

VIOLANTE

Not die, in sooth!
Who is this man who resurrects the Dead?
Why, folk whose nerves and sinews sing with life
Sicken, fall down, and seethe with death and worms
Within an hour, and they, the few who live,
Living, curse God because they did not die. . . .
He would best think of the Living, and forget
The Dead.

LIZZIA

Half-crazed with love, he dreams she will return. . . .
This is the morning after the third day —
This is the very hour she would return.
Suppose the learned doctor keep his word? —
Hence have I hung these garlands.

[*The sounds of a funeral procession heard approaching. . . . The procession passes the large doorway, going by, along the street, without. The people bear candles. . . . They pass slowly by the open door . . . bodies being carried in shrouds.*]

ONE VOICE

We bore the son . . . and now we bear the father. . . .

ANOTHER VOICE

And I or you, mayhap, will be the next.

LIZZIA [*continuing*]

These wreaths, they seem a mockery of Heaven.
I pray that God will smite me not — I do
What I am bid! . . .

VIOLANTE [*half to herself*]

She will not come! . . .
[*To Lizzia*]
Is there nothing will cure his madness?

LIZZIA

Even if she die they are to bring her hither. . . .

VIOLANTE

Hither? And all corrupt? Then Death will strike you both!

LIZZIA

Lady, I am so old I'd rather sleep
Than walk this sinful, weary world; and be —
He will unshroud her, kiss her lips, and die!

VIOLANTE [*with great bitterness*]

Fie, this our Florio — he has loved before,
And he will love again, and yet again. . . .
Women's beauty he loves, not any woman!

LIZZIA

What you have said were true ten days ago —
Do I not know him, Lady? . . . But a change
Has come upon him that I marvel at —
So great a change in such a little while. . . .
Ah, looked you on them when they were together,
Saw you how he is caught up in her face
And all the beauty of her, you would say
"Here is a love, at last, that climbs from earth to heaven!"

VIOLANTE [*laughing harshly*]

It is her beauty he loved; not she
The thing he loved! A poet, he! . . .
[*A pause.*]
It were as well you tore these garlands down:
If, by a miracle, she should return,
The Plague will have marked her with such ugliness

That even you will shine like Helen of Troy beside her!
Much will he care, then, if she sing his songs!
Had she a voice like a garden of nightingales
He could not listen to her without loathing. . . .
[*Sounds of approach of another funeral procession.*]

VIOLANTE [*continuing*]

Pray draw the arras, Lizzia, and close out
The things that they bring by. . . . They have begun
To move the night's innumerable Dead.
[*Lizzia draws the large arras. . . . From now on, till the very last, just before climax, sound and murmur of processions are continually heard.*]

VIOLANTE [*persistently*]

I think she will not come —
But, if she does, she should be spared the cruelty
Of his heart's change,
And he, her marred, plague-broken face!
Stand aside — let me pass . . .

LIZZIA [*barring way again*]

He took his oath
Before that altar, to the most high God!
You shall not break his vow. . . .

VIOLANTE

Let me go to him — here are my jewels!

FLORIO [*calling from within*]

Who is it speaks without? Whose voice is this
Wrangling and breaking in upon my peace?

LIZZIA

The Lady Violante Ugolini!

FLORIO

To-day, of all days, must I be alone. . . .
[*Florio pushes out arras from small doorway and stands before it, so that he remains unseen to Violante and Lizzia.*]

FLORIO [*to Lizzia*]

Go, Lizzia, I will speak with the Lady. . . .
Have you the wreaths hung, Lizzia?

LIZZIA

Aye, master Florio!

FLORIO

Have you the table heaped with delicacies
In the green space by the fountain-shaken pool?

LIZZIA

I go to set the viands now, my master.
[*Lizzia goes out.*]

FLORIO

Violante, if you would speak with me,
Stay where you are — I cannot look upon you.

VIOLANTE

Not look upon me?

FLORIO

Nor must you look on me. . . . I have vowed a vow!

VIOLANTE

How strange you are! . . .
I had thought to rush into your arms! . . .
Have you forgotten so soon the oaths you took?
[*She starts toward him.*]

FLORIO [*hearing the rustle of her garment.*]

Move one step further and I draw the arras!

VIOLANTE [*halting and hesitating*]

Have you forgotten the first time you saw my face
And sent a sonnet to me? . . . It seems but a day
Since you were awed by my nobility. . . .
And when I let you press your burning lips
Against my hand, you swore it made you God!
[*Sadly*]
From that time it was not far to my mouth. . . .
And, after that, what with the shining moon,
And nightingales beginning in the dusk,
And songs and music that you made for me —
In a little while I was entirely yours! . . .

FLORIO

Remember that young nobleman who died
For love of you? . . . I was your pastime, merely that!
And so I sipped what honey came my way.
But why do you come now?
Did you not leave me without a word?

VIOLANTE

My father . . .
[*Sombrely*] My father whom the Pestilence has smitten —

FLORIO [*quickly*]

You sent me no message.

VIOLANTE

Every door was watched . . . he might have had you slain . . .
He bore me off to Rome. . . .

FLORIO

You loved me, then?

VIOLANTE

And did not you love me?

FLORIO

I could have sworn I did.

VIOLANTE

O Florio! . . .
Where is my pride of rank, my woman's shame.
That I should come like this to you!

FLORIO

Speak not so, Violante — I pray you go!

VIOLANTE

You love another, then?

FLORIO [*ecstatically*]

I have loved beauty, beauty all my life!

VIOLANTE

We are not metaphors and pale abstractions,
We women . . . nor would we be prized alone
For smooth perfections. . . . [*Low and intense*] Say that you loved a woman
Smitten with the Plague, say, further, that she lived —
One among ten thousand — that she came back to you,
[The one thing sure] hideous and marred —

FLORIO

You try me sorely!
Violante, I pray you, go!

VIOLANTE [*persistently*]

I have come hither
To bid you come away with me.

FLORIO

It may not be.

VIOLANTE [*slowly*]

The other one — there is another one! —
I pity her!

FLORIO

You need not.

VIOLANTE

Ah, then, there is another?

FLORIO

Have you no pride, my Lady Violante?

VIOLANTE

That I have not,
For shameless is the heart that loves.

FLORIO

Then shamelessly I love
Another face, another heart and body,
Another soul, unto eternity —
She is all beauty to me, and all life —
So shall she be forever!

VIOLANTE

Forever? That is what you swore to me.

FLORIO

I have not sworn a single oath to her,
And yet she made earth heaven in a day,
And earth continues heaven. . . . Go, noble Lady!

VIOLANTE

You have no pity on me? . . .
You see
How humbly I've become. . . .

FLORIO

To pity you, Lady, would be cruel to her! . . .
In a month you will be glad.

VIOLANTE

You have slain me, Florio!

FLORIO

Farewell, Violante!

[*Violante affects to go. But she stops quickly at large door in back and reënters on tiptoe. Florio withdraws to his study again, after listening for a moment.*]

LIZZIA [*reëntering*]

You have not gone, my Lady Violante?

VIOLANTE

I will not go
Till I have looked upon this woman's face!

[*As she finishes these words, the great black arras in the back is listed and a hooded and veiled woman enters. She stands regarding the two other women in silence.*]

VIOLANTE

Ah!

LIZZIA

The miracle has come to pass!

[*Crosses herself.*]

VIOLANTE

Do they call you Olivia? Speak, woman!

OLIVIA

Yea, I am she — but where is Florio?

[*Violante straightens, proud and erect, as if she had been struck an invisible blow.*]

LIZZIA

He waits for you within.

OLIVIA

So he had faith I would not die?

LIZZIA

He had these garlands hung for your return.
He has lived beneath a holy vow, the days
You were not here: shut in his room,
Yours must be the first face
He sees, on his return to light and life.
He must have fallen asleep from weariness
Or he had heard your voice.

[*To Violante.*]

Now, Lady Violante, you must go!

VIOLANTE [*indignant*]

How? I must go?

LIZZIA

You would not stay?

VIOLANTE

Yea, I would stay to see this love grow dark
And shrink to hate.

OLIVIA [*astonished*]

And shrink to hate?

VIOLANTE

When you remove your veil
Behind which ugliness that beggars hell
Lies hidden —

OLIVIA [*dazed*]

Ugliness?

VIOLANTE

Cast by your veil! . . .
Well may you shrink from your own hideousness
Since the foul plague has withered up your face
And seared it till you die. . . .
There shines your mirror, wrought of polished brass —
How many hours you have dallied at it
Only the beauty that you once possessed
Can tell.
You will no longer find a use for it.

OLIVIA [*recovering herself*]

I trust I shall!

LIZZIA [*to Olivia*]

Alas, dear God! And is it true, Olivia?

OLIVIA [*to Lizzia*]

Would he not love me still if it were true?

LIZZIA [*to Olivia*]

I am old and wretched and full of woe.
I have known life too long.

VIOLANTE [*to Olivia*]

He whose one cry is beauty! How could *that* be?

OLIVIA [*almost singing in speech*]

Then, God be praised, I need not try him thus!
For God has wrought two miracles with me:
I live, and I am beautiful!

VIOLANTE

Unveil your face, then — give yourself to sight.

OLIVIA

His must be the first eyes that look on me.

VIOLANTE

Ah, so you trust that you, with fond deceit,
May find some magic way to cozen him?

LIZZIA [*with great emotion*]

Go, Lady — I see darkness in the air,
I thrill to some strange horror, yet unguessed. . . .
Go, Lady Violante, I pray you, go!
[*Lizzia lifts arras in back for Violante's exit. Violante does not move from where she stands.*]

VIOLANTE [*persistently, to Olivia*]

Woman it is your beauty that he loved,
And that alone . . . just as he loves a flower
Or sunset. . . . That gone, lo, his love is gone!

OLIVIA

Strange woman, there is evil in your voice!
And yet I know he loves me for myself,
Taking my beauty, none the less, in gladness
Like any transitory gift from God.

VIOLANTE

And yet you dare not put him to the test?

OLIVIA

What test?

VIOLANTE

To make him first believe
That you are ugly!

OLIVIA

I would not toy with such a splendid gift
As a man's love.

VIOLANTE [*mocking*]

Ah . . . in sooth?

OLIVIA

How strange you look . . . yet stranger is your speech.

VIOLANTE

Before you came — whom loved he then?

OLIVIA

I do not think he was like other men.

VIOLANTE

Like other men he took and tossed aside,
Deceived and lied and went from heart to heart
Reaping the richness of each woman's soul.

OLIVIA

Go, lest I strike you!

VIOLANTE

Poor, fond, believing child —
Now I would not have you test his love!

OLIVIA [*stirred*]

By all the saints, I'll put him to the test! . . .
[*As Violante steps closer to her*]
Nay, I'll not let you look upon my face . . .
He must, as I have vowed, look on it first,
Nor will I break that vow — [*Her vanity conquering*]
But lift yon mirror
And you shall look in it and see me there
Reflected! . . .
[*Violante lifts mirror so she and Lizzia can see reflection.*]

OLIVIA [*with simplicity*]

Keep your backs so!
[*Unveiling briefly, then drawing veil again.*]
There! Have I lied?

VIOLANTE

He always worshiped beauty. . . . You are fair!

OLIVIA

Soon will you know our love has mighty wings
Outsoaring time into eternity!

VIOLANTE

I'll have him forth — are you ready for the trial?

OLIVIA

Do you persuade him of my ugliness. . . .
If he loves me not I shall go forth and die —
Then life will be far too like death to live!

LIZZIA [*agonized*]

My little children, you must not do this thing!
Love is too high a gift to play with so.
God only has the right to put the heart
Of man to trial!

VIOLANTE [*to Lizzia*]

Will you be quiet, old woman!

OLIVIA [*to Lizzia*]

I would not hold him if he only loved
My beauty, and not me. The test is just. . . .

VIOLANTE [*to Lizzia*]

Go you, inform him of her return. . . .
But tell him that that flower which was her face
Is shriveled up and lean as any hag's.

LIZZIA

Now God forbid I should deceive him so!

VIOLANTE

Not even for gold?

LIZZIA

Have you no fear of God?
[*A stir is heard within.*]

VIOLANTE

Hush! . . . I will do it, then.
[*Going up to small arras over study door, she calls.*]
Florio! . . . Florio! . . .

FLORIO [*from within, after a brief space*]

Who is it calls me?

VIOLANTE

It is I, Violante!

FLORIO

Why have you come again?

VIOLANTE

I have returned, Florio,
In strange times, bearing strange news.

FLORIO

My soul is full of death — I pray you go!

VIOLANTE

It could not be — aye, it is passing strange! —
She said her name was "Olivia."

FLORIO

Olivia, ah, she lives!

VIOLANTE

Then, it is true? You love this shriveled woman?

FLORIO

Shriveled woman?

VIOLANTE

Ugly and bent and gray — a woman
Who says in as few words she is your mistress.

FLORIO

Has she come? Is she here? . . . Go, Violante —
Go, leave us two alone!

VIOLANTE

She walked as one bewitched in a dream.
She seemed to fear. . . . I bade her wait without. . . .
Florio, could it be true you loved this woman?

FLORIO

Has all the brightness fallen from her eyes,
The glory and the wonder from her face?

VIOLANTE

She *lives!* How few have had the plague and *lived!*

FLORIO

Alas, woe, woe is me!

VIOLANTE [*triumphantly, to Olivia*]

You heard?
[*To Florio.*]
Come forth — she's at the threshold.

FLORIO

Bid her wait.
Give me space for thought . . . a little space . . .
This is almost as horrible as her death . . .
[*Long silence. The women wait. . . . Groaning within. Olivia starts forward to go to Florio.*]

VIOLANTE [*to Olivia*]

Do you flinch now? I knew you would not dare!
[*Olivia stops. Proudly she remains still.*]

VIOLANTE [*as arras stirs*]

Now bear *your* part — continue the deceit.

OLIVIA [*in a frightened voice*]

I know he loves me. Yet a little while
And I will draw my veil!
[*Another groan. Olivia starts forward again.*]
Oh, I cannot!

VIOLANTE [*mocking*]

I knew you would not dare!
[*Again Olivia stops still.*
Now, after a long pause, during which death processions are heard to pass, the arras over the smaller doorway is slowly put aside. Florio enters, swaying. He holds his cloak about his brow.]

FLORIO

Where is Olivia?

OLIVIA [*feigning with an effort*]

Florio, God pity you and me —
I had rather died! . . .

FLORIO

Oh, speak not so!

OLIVIA

My "beauty clean and golden as the sun,"
As once you sang it, has become so gross
And fearful, that I veil it, broken with shame,
From eyes of men. . . . [*A pause.*]
'Tis well you cloak your eyes,
For should I drop my veil through which I glance — [*Another pause.*]
Shall I go?

FLORIO [*breathing heavily*]

No . . . for I love you . . . bide with me . . .
[*With great effort*]. . Though you be foul, Olivia!
[*As he still stands muffled, Olivia grows more and more frightened at what she is doing, and now, in complete surrender to terror, gives over the deceit and speaks the truth.*]

OLIVIA

Florio, my Florio — draw down your arm. . . .
No longer need you fear to look on me —
It was a test, my love, a cruel test!
[*She draws aside her veil, the other women in back of her, Florio obliquely in front. Her face is seen to be one of surpassing loveliness. Florio, groaning, keeps his face cloaked and does not speak.*]

OLIVIA

Look, my beloved, or I shall go mad!
[*Olivia tugs at his arm. He lowers it. He exposes a sightless face.*]

LIZZIA [*breaking in on the awful pause*].

Self-blinded, my poor master!

VIOLANTE

Oh, Florio, what is this that I have done!
[*Olivia has dropped slowly back, stricken dumb with voiceless terror. Her throat works convulsively with a scream which now rushes forth. Florio falls to his knees, again covering his face and bowing his head. Olivia comes and kneels, grief-stricken, beside him, putting one arm about him in support.*]

OLIVIA [*sobbing*]

There is . . . no one . . . that's . . . uglier . . . than I!

FLORIO [*convulsively*]

You were the glory of the world, Olivia! . . .
And now . . . your beauty . . . that is . . . dead . . . will always be . . . to me . . .
The glory of . . . the world! . . . forever and forever! . . .

OLIVIA

Oh, if you could but see my ugliness —
I think there's nothing like it in the world!
O God, why did I not die an hour ago!

VIOLANTE [*crazed anew with jealousy*]

Florio, Florio — Olivia lies!
Her beauty floods the very room with light —
You are deceived most horribly!

OLIVIA

Command that woman hence;
She is the source and cause of all our ill.

FLORIO

What does this mean? My soul is sick to death!

VIOLANTE

I tell you, Florio, that she lies to you.
[*To Lizzia.*]
Tell him the truth, old woman, and beware,
As you have fear of Hell, belief in God,
And hope of Heaven, to perjure not your soul!

LIZZIA [*at first frightened and irresolute, then quietly determined.*]
God help me — she is surpassingly — ugly!
[*Returning Violante glare for glare.*]
Her ugliness —!
[*Breaking down, she goes to altar and drops on knees before it.*]

FLORIO

Go, Violante!

VIOLANTE

I could curse God for this!
[*Violante staggers toward the great black curtain in doorway, where she supports herself by clinging to it.*]

FLORIO

Olivia, come back to me from the great Dark —
All life is but a ghost. Where are you, Olivia?

OLIVIA

I am here — close to you, Florio!

FLORIO

What have you women done to me!
[*To Olivia.*] Your face!
An evil dream is in my heart!
[*He gropes, catches her quickly on each side of the head with both hands. He draws her down to him. He runs his fingers flickeringly over the smooth, rosy beauty of her face. . . .*

Then, with an eyeless, uplifted countenance which reveals complete understanding and an abyss of horror and madness, he slowly pushes Olivia away. . . .
He lifts his fingers up grotesquely in the air, each distinct and widespread — painfully, as if fire spurted out of the ends of them. Olivia weeps. . . .
Lizzia intones prayers. . . .
Violante holds herself erect and triumphant, clinging to the great arras in back, struggling for strength to go out.
At this moment another death-procession passes. . . . A Miserere is chanted. . . .
A dawn of horror breaks over Violante's face . . . she shrinks inward from the passing procession, feeling the huge horror of the Pestilence.
Olivia gathers Florio's unresisting head to her bosom. . . .
The sound of the Miserere dies off. . . .
Into this tableau breaks Dioneo. Slowly he parts the arras.]

DIONEO [*grimacing, and seeing, at first, only Lizzia at the altar.*]

Bestir yourself, old woman —
Where is your master, Florio,
And Lady Violante Ugolini? . . .
This is no time for lovers' dallying. . . .
Tell them that Seignior Boccaccio
Sends word through me that we must wait no longer.
And, furthermore, he bids me say — that
[*Violante falls in a faint across his feet.*
Dioneo sees all. Shrinking back.]
Merciful God! . . .

[*Curtain.*]

ANOTHER WAY OUT

A Comedy

By Lawrence Langner

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Another Way Out was originally produced by the Washington Square Players at the Comedy Theatre, New York, on November 13th, 1916, with the following cast:

Margaret Marshall.....*Gwladys Wynne.*
Mrs. Abbey.....*Jean Robb.*
Pomeroy Pendleton.....*Jose Ruben.*
Baroness de Meauville.....*Helen Westley.*
Charles P. K. Fenton.....*Robert Strange*

Time: *The Present.*

Produced under the direction of Mr. Phillip Moeller.

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ANOTHER WAY OUT

A Comedy

By Lawrence Langner

[Scene: *The studio in Pendleton's apartment. A large room, with sky-light in center wall, doors right and left, table set for breakfast; a vase with red flowers decorates the table. Center back stage, in front of sky-light, modeling stand upon which is placed a rough statuette, covered by cloth. To one side of this is a large screen. The furnishings are many hued, the cushions a flare of color, and the pictures fantastically futuristic.*

At Rise: Mrs. Abbey, a benevolent looking, middle-aged woman, in neat clothes and apron, is arranging some dishes on the table. Margaret, a very modern young woman, is exercising vigorously. She is decidedly good-looking. Her eyes are direct, her complexion fresh, and her movements free. Her brown hair is "bobbed," and she wears a picturesque Grecian robe.]

Mrs. Abbey. Breakfast is ready, ma'am.

[*Margaret sits at table and helps herself. Exit Mrs. Abbey, left.*]

Margaret [*calling*]. Pommy dear. Breakfast is on the table.

Pendleton [*from without*]. I'll be there in a moment.

[*Margaret glances through paper; Pendleton enters, door right. He is tall and thin, and of æsthetic appearance. His long blond hair is brushed loosely over his forehead and he is dressed in a helitrope-colored dressing gown. He lights a cigarette.*]

Margaret. I thought you were going to stop smoking before breakfast.

Pendleton. My dear, I can't possibly stand the taste of tooth paste in my mouth all day.

[*Pendleton sits at table. Enters Mrs. Abbey with tray. Pendleton helps himself, then drops his knife and fork with a clang. Mrs. Abbey and Margaret are startled.*]

Mrs. Abbey. Anything the matter, sir?

Pendleton. Dear, dear! My breakfast is quite spoiled again.

Mrs. Abbey [*concerned*]. Spoiled, sir?

Pendleton [*pointing to red flowers on breakfast table*]. Look at those flowers, Mrs. Abbey. Not only are they quite out of harmony with the color scheme in this room, but they're positively red, and you know I have a perfect horror of red.

Mrs. Abbey. But you like them that color sometimes, sir. What am I to do when you're so temperamental about 'em.

Margaret. Temperamental. I should say bad-tempered.

Mrs. Abbey [*soothingly*]. Oh no, ma'am. It isn't bad temper. I understand Mr. Pendleton. It's just another bad night he's had, that's what it is.

Pendleton [*sarcastically polite*]. Mrs. Abbey, you appear to have an intimate knowledge of how I pass the nights. It's becoming quite embarrassing.

Mrs. Abbey. You mustn't mind an old woman like me, sir.

[*The sound of a piano hopelessly out of tune, in the apartment upstairs, is heard, the player banging out Mendelssohn's Wedding March with unusual insistence.*]

Pendleton. There! That confounded piano again!

Margaret. And they always play the Wedding March. There must be an old maid living there.

Mrs. Abbey. They're doing that for a reason.

Margaret. What reason?

Mrs. Abbey. Their cook tole me yes-

terday that her missus thinks if she keeps on a-playing of the Wedding March, p'raps it'll give you an' Mr. Pendleton the idea of getting married. She don't believe in couples livin' to-gether, like you an' Mr. Pendleton.

MARGARET. No?

MRS. ABBEY. And I just said you an' Mr. Pendleton had been living together so long, it was my opinion you might just as well be married an' done with it.

MARGARET [*angrily*]. Your opinion is quite uncalled for, Mrs. Abbey.

PENDLETON. Why shouldn't Mrs. Abbey give us her opinion? It may be valuable. Look at her experiences in matrimony.

MRS. ABBEY. In matrimony, and out of it, too.

MARGARET [*sitting*]. But Mrs. Abbey has no right to discuss our affairs with other people's maids.

MRS. ABBEY. I'll be glad to quit if I don't suit the mistress.

MARGARET [*angrily*]. There! Mistress again! How often have I asked you not to refer to me as the mistress?

MRS. ABBEY. No offense, ma'am.

PENDLETON. You'd better see if there's any mail, Mrs. Abbey, and take those flowers away with you.

MRS. ABBEY. Very well, sir.

[*Exit Mrs. Abbey door center.*]

MARGARET. What an old-fashioned point of view Mrs. Abbey has.

[*Pendleton takes up paper and commences to read.*]

MARGARET. Pommy, why do you stoop so?

PENDLETON. Am I stooping?

MARGARET. I'm tired of telling you. You ought to take more exercise.

[*Pendleton continues to read.*]

MARGARET. One reason why the Greeks were the greatest of artists was because they cultivated the body as carefully as the mind.

PENDLETON. Oh! Hang the Greeks!

[*Enter Mrs. Abbey right, with letters.*]

MRS. ABBEY. There are your letters, sir. [*Coldly.*] And these are yours, ma'am.

[*Exit Mrs. Abbey left.*]

MARGARET [*who has opened her letters meanwhile*]. How delightful! Tom Del Valli has asked us to a party at his studio next Friday.

PENDLETON [*opening his letters*]. Both of us?

MARGARET [*giving him letter*]. Yes, and Helen Marsden wants us for Saturday.

PENDLETON. Both of us?

MARGARET [*picking up another letter*]. Yes, and here's one from Bobby Watson for Sunday.

PENDLETON. Both of us?

MARGARET. Yes.

PENDLETON. Really, Margaret, this is becoming exasperating. [*Holds up letters.*] Here are four more, I suppose for both of us. People keep on inviting us out together time after time as though we were the most conventional married couple on God's earth.

MARGARET. Do you object to going out with me?

PENDLETON [*doubtfully*]. No, it isn't that. But we're having too much of a good thing. And I've come to the conclusion that it's your fault.

MARGARET [*indignantly*]. Oh! it's my fault? Of course you'd blame me. Why?

PENDLETON. Because you have such an absurd habit of boasting to people of your devotion for me, when we're out.

MARGARET. You surely don't expect me to quarrel with you in public?

PENDLETON. It isn't necessary to go to that extent. But then everybody believes that we're utterly, almost stupidly in love with one another, what can you expect?

MARGARET. You said once you never wanted me to suppress anything.

PENDLETON. That was before we began to live together.

MARGARET. What could I have done?

PENDLETON [*up right*]. Anything just so we could have a little more freedom instead of being tied to one another the way we are. Never a moment when we're not together, never a day when I'm not interviewed by special article writers from almost every paper and magazine in the country, as the only successful exponent of the theory that love can be so perfect that the marriage contract degrades it. I put it to you, Margaret, if this is a free union it is simply intolerable!

MARGARET. But aren't we living together so as to have more freedom? Think of what it might be if we were married. Didn't you once write that "When marriage comes in at the door, freedom flies out at the window"?

PENDLETON. Are we any better off, with everybody treating us as though we were living together to prove a principle?

MARGARET. Well, aren't we incidently? You said so yourself. We can be a beautiful example to other people, and show them how to lead the pure natural lives of the later Greeks?

PENDLETON. Damn the later Greeks! Why do you always throw those confounded later Greeks in my face? We've got to look at it from our standpoint. This situation must come to an end.

MARGARET. What can we do?

PENDLETON. It rests with you.

MARGARET. With me?

PENDLETON. You can compromise yourself with somebody publicly. That'll put an end to everything.

MARGARET. How will that end it?

PENDLETON. It'll break down the morally sanctified atmosphere in which we're living. Then perhaps, people will regard us as immoral and treat us like decent human beings again.

MARGARET. But I don't want to compromise myself.

PENDLETON. If you believe in your own ideas, you must.

MARGARET. But why should I have to do it?

PENDLETON. It will be so easy for you.

MARGARET. Why can't we both be compromised? That would be better still.

PENDLETON. I should find it a bore. You, unless my memory fails me, would enjoy it.

MARGARET. You needn't be cynical. Even if you don't enjoy it, you can work it into a novel.

PENDLETON. It's less exertion to imagine an affair of that sort, and the result would probably be more saleable. Besides I have no interest whatsoever in women, at least, in the women we know.

MARGARET. For that matter, I don't know any eligible men.

PENDLETON. What about Bob Lockwood?

MARGARET. But he's your best friend!

PENDLETON. Exactly — no man ever really trusts his best friend. He'll probably compromise you without compunction.

MARGARET. I'm afraid he'd be too dangerous — he tells you all his secrets. Whom will you choose?

PENDLETON. It's a matter of complete indifference to me.

MARGARET. I've heard a lot of queer stories about Jean Roberts. How would she do?

PENDLETON [*firmly*]. Margaret, I don't mind being party to a flirtation — but I draw the line at being the victim of a seduction.

MARGARET. Why not leave it to chance? Let it be the next interesting woman you meet.

PENDLETON. That might be amusing. But there must be an age limit. And how about you?

MARGARET [*takes cloth off statuette and discloses figure of Apollo in rough modeling clay*]. Me! Why not the new model who is coming to-day to pose for my Apollo?

PENDLETON. Well, if he's anything like that, you ought to be able to create a sensation. Then, perhaps, we shall have some real freedom.

MARGARET. Pommy, do you still love me as much as you did?

PENDLETON. How you sentimentalize! Do you think I'd be willing to enter into a flirtation with a strange woman, if I didn't want to keep on living with you?

MARGARET. And we won't have to break up our little home, will we?

PENDLETON. No, anything to save the home. [*Catches himself.*] My God! If any of my readers should hear me say that! To think that I, Pomeroy Pendleton, should be trying to save my own home. And yet, how characteristically paradoxical.

MARGARET [*interrupting*]. You are going to philosophize! Give me a kiss.

[*She goes to him, sits on his lap, and places her arm on his shoulder; he takes out cigarette, she lights it for him.*]

PENDLETON [*brought back to reality*]. I have some work to do — I must go.

MARGARET. A kiss!

PENDLETON [*kisses her carelessly*]. There let me go.

MARGARET. I want a real kiss.

PENDLETON. Don't be silly, dear, I can't play this morning. I've simply got to finish my last chapter.

[*A bell rings, Mrs. Abbey enters and goes to door.*]

MRS. ABBEY. There's a lady to see Mr. Pendleton.

MARGARET. Tell her to come in!

PENDLETON. But, Margaret!

MARGARET. Remember! [*Significantly.*] The first woman you meet!

[*Exit Margaret. Mrs. Abbey enters with Baroness de Meauville. Exit Mrs. Abbey.*]

BARONESS DE MEAUVILLE [*speaking with a pronounced English accent*]. Good morning, Mr. Pendleton, I'm the Baroness de Meauville!

PENDLETON [*recalling her name*]. Baroness de Meauville? Ah, the costumiere?

BARONESS. Not a costumiere, Mr. Pendleton, I am an artist, an artist in modern attire. A woman is to me what a canvas is to a painter.

PENDLETON. Excuse me for receiving you in my dressing gown. I was at work.

BARONESS. I like to see men in dressing gowns — yours is charming.

PENDLETON [*flattered and pleased*]. Do you like it? I designed it myself.

BARONESS [*looking seductively into his eyes*]. How few really creative artists there are in America.

PENDLETON [*modestly*]. You flatter me.

BARONESS. Not at all. You must know that I'm a great admirer of yours, Mr. Pendleton. I've read every one of your books. I feel I know you as an old friend.

PENDLETON. That's very nice of you!

[*The Baroness reclines on couch; takes jeweled cigarette case from reticule and offers Pendleton a cigarette.*]

BARONESS. Will you smoke?

PENDLETON. Thanks.

[*Pendleton lights her cigarette, then his own. He draws his chair up to the couch. An atmosphere of mutual interest is established.*]

BARONESS. Mr. Pendleton, I have a mission in life. It is to make the American woman the best dressed woman in the world. I came here to-day because I want you to help me.

PENDLETON. But I have no ambitions in that direction.

BARONESS. Why should you have ambitions? Only the bourgeoisie have ambitions. We artists have inspirations. I want to breathe into you the spirit of my great undertaking. Already I have opened my place in the smartest part of the Avenue. Already I have drawn my assistants from all parts of the world. Nothing is lacking to complete my plans but you.

PENDLETON. Me? Why me?

BARONESS [*endearingly*]. Are you not considered one of the foremost men of letters in America?

PENDLETON [*modestly*]. Didn't you say you had read all my books?

BARONESS. Are you not the only writer who has successfully portrayed the emotional side of American life?

PENDLETON [*decidedly*]. Yes.

BARONESS. Exactly. That is why I have chosen you to write my advertisements.

PENDLETON [*aghast*]. But, Baroness!

BARONESS. You're not going to say that. It's so ordinary.

PENDLETON. But, but, you want me to write advertisements!

BARONESS. Please don't disappoint me.

PENDLETON. Yes, I suppose that's so. But one has a sense of pride.

BARONESS. Art comes before Pride. Consider my feelings, an aristocrat, coming here to America and engaging in commerce, and advertising, and other dreadful things, and all for the sake of Art!

PENDLETON. But you make money out of it!

BARONESS. Only incidentally. Just as you, in writing my advertisements, would make, say ten thousand or so, as a sort of accident. But don't let us talk of money. It's perfectly revolting, isn't it? Art is Life, and I believe in Life for Art's sake. That's why I'm a success.

PENDLETON. Indeed? How interesting. Please go on.

BARONESS. When a woman comes to me for a gown, I don't measure body, why should I? I measure her mind. I find her color harmony. In a moment I can tell whether she ought to wear scarlet, mauve, taupe, magenta, or any other color, so as to fall into her proper rhythm. Every one has a rhythm, you know. [*Pendleton sits on sofa.*] But I don't have to explain all this to you, Mr. Pendleton. You understand it intuitively. This heliotrope you are wearing shows me at once that you are in rhythm.

PENDLETON [*thinks of Margaret*]. I'm not so sure that I am. What you say interests me. May I ask you a question?

BARONESS. Yes, but I may not answer it.

PENDLETON. Why do you wear heliotrope and the same shade as mine?

BARONESS [*with mock mystery*]. You mustn't ask me that.

PENDLETON. I'm all curiosity.

BARONESS. Curiosity is dangerous.

PENDLETON. Supposing I try to find out?

BARONESS. That may be even more dangerous.

PENDLETON. I'm fond of that kind of danger.

BARONESS. Take care! I'm very fragile.

PENDLETON. Isn't heliotrope in rhythm with the faint reflection of passion?

BARONESS. How brutal of you to have said it.

PENDLETON [*coming closer to her*]. I, too, am in rhythm with heliotrope.

BARONESS [*with joy*]. How glad I am. Thank God you've no desire to kiss my lips.

PENDLETON. Only your finger-tips.

[*They exchange kisses on finger-tips.*]

PENDLETON. Your fingers are like soft, pale, waxen tapers!

BARONESS. Your kisses are the breathings that light them into quivering flame!

PENDLETON. Exquisite — exquisite!

BARONESS [*withdrawing her hands*]. *That* was a moment!

PENDLETON. We must have many such.

BARONESS. Many? That's too near too much.

PENDLETON [*feverishly*]. We shall, dear lady.

BARONESS. How I adore your writings! They have made me realize the beauty of an ideal union, the love of one man for one woman at a time. Let us have such a union, you and me.

PENDLETON [*taken back*]. But I live in such a union already.

BARONESS [*rising in amazement*]. And only a moment ago you kissed me!

PENDLETON. Well — what of it?

BARONESS. Don't you see what we've done? You are living in one of those wonderful unions you describe in your books — and I've let you kiss me. I've committed a sacrilege.

PENDLETON. You're mistaken. It isn't a sacrilege. It's an opportunity.

BARONESS [*dramatically*]. How can you say that — you whose words have inspired my deepest intimacies. No, I must go. [*Makes for the door.*] I — must — go.

PENDLETON. You don't understand. I exaggerated everything so in my confounded books.

BARONESS. Please ask her to forgive me. Please tell her I thought you were married, otherwise, never, never, would I have permitted you to kiss me.

PENDLETON. What made you think I was married?

BARONESS. One often believes what one hopes.

PENDLETON. You take it too seriously. Let me explain.

BARONESS. What is there to explain? Our experience has been complete. Why spoil it by anti-climax?

PENDLETON. Am I never to see you again?

BARONESS. Who knows? If your present union should end, and some day your soul needs — some one?

[*Exit door center, her manner full of promise.*]

PENDLETON [*with feeling*]. Good-by — long, pale fingers.

[*Enter Margaret, door right.*]

MARGARET. Did you get a good start with the scandal?

PENDLETON. Not exactly. I may as well admit it was a failure through no fault of mine, of course. And now, I simply must finish that last chapter.

[*He exits. Margaret rings. Mrs. Abby enters.*]

MARGARET. You may clear, Mrs. Abbey.

MRS. ABBEY. Very well, ma'am.

[*She attends to clearing the table.*]

MARGARET. Mrs. Abbey, have you worked for many people living together, like Mr. Pendleton and myself?

MRS. ABBEY. Lor', Ma'am, yes. I've worked in nearly every house on the south side of Washington Square.

MARGARET. Mr. Pendleton says I'm as domestic as any wife could be. Were the others like me?

MRS. ABBEY. Most of them, ma'am, but some was regular hussies; not only a-livin' with their fellers — but havin' a good time, too. That's what I call real immoral.

[*Bell rings. Mrs. Abbey opens door center and passes out. Conversation with Fenton without is heard. Mrs. Abbey comes back.*]

MRS. ABBEY. A young man wants to see you, ma'am.

MARGARET. That's the new model. I'll get my working apron.

[*Exit Margaret, door right. Mrs. Abbey calls through door center.*]

MRS. ABBEY. You c'n come in.

[*Enter door left, Charles P. K. Fenton, dictionary salesman. He is a strikingly handsome young man, offensively smartly dressed in a black and white check suit, gaudy tie, and white socks. His hair is brushed back from his forehead like a glossy sheath. He carries a black bag. His manner is distinctly "male."*]

MRS. ABBEY [*points to screen*]. You can undress behind there.

FENTON. Undress? Say, what's this? A Turkish bath?

MRS. ABBEY. Did you expect to have a private room all to yourself?

FENTON [*looking around*]. What am I to undress for?

MRS. ABBEY. The missus will be here in a minute.

FENTON. Good night! I'm goin'.

[*Makes for door.*]

MRS. ABBEY. What's the matter? Ain't you the Missus' new model?

FENTON. A model! Ha! Ha! You've sure got the wrong number this time. I'm in the dictionary line, ma'am.

MRS. ABBEY. Well, of all the impudence! You a book agent, and a-walkin' in here.

FENTON. Well, you asked me in, didn't you? Can't I see the missus, jest for a minute?

MRS. ABBEY [*good-naturedly*]. Very well. Here she is. [*Confidentially.*] And I advise you to remove that Spearmint from your mouth, if you want to sell any dictionaries in this house.

FENTON [*placing hand to mouth*]. Where shall I put it?

MRS. ABBEY. You'd better swallow it!

[*Fenton tries to do so, chokes, turns red, and places his hand to mouth.*]

MARGARET [*to Fenton*]. I'm so glad to see you.

[*Fenton is most embarrassed. Mrs. Abbey, in surprise, attempts to explain situation.*]

MRS. ABBEY. But, ma'am —

MARGARET. You may go, Mrs. Abbey.

MRS. ABBEY. But, but, ma'am —

MARGARET [*severely*]. You may go, Mrs. Abbey. [*Exit Mrs. Abbey in a huff.*] I'm so glad they sent you up to see me. Won't you sit down?

[*Fenton finds it a difficult matter to handle the situation. He adopts his usual formula for an "opening," but his speech is mechanical and without conviction. Margaret adds to the embarrassment by stepping around him and examining him with professional interest.*]

FENTON. Madam, I represent the Globe Advertising Publishing Sales Co., the largest publishers of dictionaries in the world.

MARGARET [*continuing to appraise him*]. Then you're not the new model?

FENTON. No, ma'am.

MARGARET. What a pity! Never mind, go on.

FENTON. As I was saying, ma'am, I represent the Advertising Globe Publishing — I mean the Globe Publishing Sales Publishing Co., the largest publishers of dictionaries in the world. For some time past we have felt there was a demand for a new Encyclopaedic Dictionary, madam, one that would not only fill up a good deal of space in the book-

shelf, making an attractive addition to the home, but also containing the most complete collection of words in the English language.

MARGARET [*who has taken a pencil and is measuring Fenton while he speaks; Fenton's discomfort is obvious. He attempts to rearrange his tie and coat, thinking she is examining him.*] Please go on talking, it's so interesting.

FENTON. Statistics show that the Woman of Average Education in America, Madam, has command of but fifteen hundred words. This new dictionary, Madam, [*Produces book from bag.*] will give you command of over eight hundred and fifty thousand.

MARGARET [*archly*]. So you are a dealer in words — how perfectly romantic.

FENTON [*warming*]. Most of these words, madam, are not used more than a dozen times a year. They are our Heritage from the Past. And all these words, to say nothing of the fact that the dictionary fills five inches in a bookshelf, making an attractive addition to the library, being handsomely bound in half-cloth — all these are yours, ma'am, for the price of one dollar.

[*He places dictionary in her hand. She examines it.*]

FENTON. If you have a son, madam, the possession of this dictionary will give him an opportunity of acquiring that knowledge of our language which made Abraham Lincoln the Father of our Country. Madam, opportunity knocks at the door only once and *This* is *your* opportunity at one dollar.

MARGARET [*meaningly*]. Yes, this is my opportunity! I'll buy the dictionary and now [*sweetly*] won't you tell me your name?

FENTON [*pocketing dollar*]. My name is Charles P. K. Fenton.

MARGARET. Mr. Fenton, would you mind doing me a favor?

FENTON [*looking dubiously towards the screen*]. Why, I guess not, ma'am.

MARGARET. I want you to take off your coat.

FENTON [*puzzled*]. You're not trying to kid me, ma'am?

MARGARET. I just want to see your development. Do you mind?

FENTON [*removes coat*]. Why, no, ma'am, if that's all you want.

MARGARET. Now, bring your arm up, tighten the muscles. [*Fenton does as she bids; Margaret thumps his arm approvingly.*] Splendid! You must take lots of exercise, Mr. Fenton.

FENTON. Not me, ma'am. I never had no time for exercise; I got that workin' in a freight yard.

MARGARET. I suppose you think me rather peculiar, Mr. Fenton.

FENTON. You said it, Miss.

MARGARET. You see I'm a sculptress. [*Points to statuette.*] This is my work.

FENTON. You made that? Gee! that's great. [*Examines statuette.*] Just like them statues at the Metropolitan.

MARGARET. That figure is Apollo, Mr. Fenton.

FENTON. Oh, Apollo.

MARGARET. I was to engage a professional model for it, but I could never hope to get a professional as fine a type as you. Will you pose for it?

FENTON [*aghast*]. Me? That feller there without any clothes. [*Dubiously.*] Well, I don't know. It's kind of chilly here.

MARGARET. If I draped you, it would spoil some of your lines. [*Seeing his hesitation.*] But I will if you like.

FENTON [*relieved*]. Ah, now you're talking.

MARGARET. So, you'll really come?

FENTON. How about this evening?

MARGARET. Splendid! Sit down. [*Fenton does so.*] Mr. Fenton, you've quite aroused my curiosity. I know so few business men. Is your work interesting?

FENTON. Well, I can't say it was, until I started selling around this neighborhood.

MARGARET. Is it difficult?

FENTON. Not if you've got personality, Miss. That's the thing, personality. If a feller hasn't got personality, he can't sell goods, that's sure.

MARGARET. What do you mean by personality, Mr. Fenton.

FENTON. Well, it's what sells the goods. I don't know how else to explain it exactly. I'll look it up in the dictionary. [*Takes dictionary and turns pages.*] Here it is, ma'am. Per — per — why, it

isn't in here. I guess they don't put in words that everybody knows. We all know what personality means. It's what sells the goods.

MARGARET. I adore a strong, virile, masculine personality.

FENTON I don't quite get you, madam.

MARGARET. The men I know have so much of the feminine in them.

FENTON. Oh, "Cissies"!

MARGARET [*flirtingly*]. They lack the magnetic forcefulness which I like so much in you.

FENTON. I believe you are kidding me. Does that mean you like me?

MARGARET. That's rather an embarrassing question.

FENTON. You must or you wouldn't let me speak to you this way.

MARGARET [*archly*]. Never mind whether I like you. Tell me whether you like me?

FENTON [*feeling more at home*]. Gee! I didn't get on to you at first. Sure I like you.

MARGARET. Then we're going to be good friends.

FENTON. You just bet me are. Say, got a date for to-morrow evening?

MARGARET. No.

FENTON. How about the movies? There's a fine feature film at the Strand. Theda Bara in "The Lonesome Vampire," five reels. They say it's got "Gloria's Romance" beat a mile.

MARGARET. I don't know that I'd care to go there.

FENTON. How about a run down to Coney?

MARGARET. Coney! I've always wanted to do wild Pagan things.

FENTON. Say, you'll tell me your name, won't you?

MARGARET. Margaret Marshall.

FENTON. Do you mind if I call you Margie?

MARGARET. If you do, I must call you —

FENTON. Charley. Gee, I like the name of Margie. Some class to that.

MARGARET. I'm glad you like it.

FENTON [*moving nearer*]. And some class to you!

MARGARET [*coyly*]. So you really like me?

FENTON. You bet. Say, before I go, you've got to give me a kiss, Margie.

MARGARET. Well, I don't know. Aren't you rather "rushing" me?

FENTON. Say, you are a kidder.

[*He draws her up from her chair, and kisses her warmly on the lips.*]

MARGARET. [*ecstastically*]. You have the true Greek spirit! [*They kiss again.*] If only Pommy would kiss me that way!

FENTON. Pommy? Who's Pommy?

MARGARET. Pommy is the man I live with.

FENTON. Your husband!

MARGARET. No, we just live together. You see, we don't believe in marriage.

FENTON [*pushing her away in horror*]. I thought there was something queer about all this. Does he live here?

MARGARET. Yes. [*Points to door.*] He's in there now.

FENTON [*excitedly*]. Good night! I'm goin'.

[*Looks for hat.*]

MARGARET [*speaking with real anguish*]. You're surely not going just on that account.

FENTON [*taking hat and bag*]. Isn't that enough?

MARGARET [*emotionally*]. Please don't go. Listen, I can't suppress my feeling for you; I never do with anybody. I liked you the moment I saw you, I want you as a friend, a good friend. You can't go now, just when everything's about to begin.

FENTON [*severely*]. Fair's fair, Miss. If he's keeping you, you can't be taking up with me at the same time. That puts the finish on it.

MARGARET. But he doesn't keep me. I keep myself.

FENTON. Wait a minute. You support yourself, and live with him of your own free will. Then you've got no excuse for being immoral; 'tisn't like you had to make your living at it. [*At door.*] Good-by.

MARGARET. But I can explain everything.

FENTON. It's no use, Miss. Even though I am a salesman, I've got a sense of honor. I sized you up as a married woman when I came in just now, or I never would have made love to you at all.

MARGARET. Oh — wait! Supposing I

should want to buy some more dictionaries.

FENTON [*returning*]. You've got my card, Miss. The 'phone number is on it. Bryant 4253. [*Sees Margaret hang her head.*] Don't feel hurt, Miss. You'll get over these queer ideas some day, and when you do, well, you've got my number. So long, kid.

[*Exit Fenton, door, center.*]

MARGARET [*taking his card from table and placing it to her lips soulfully*]. My Apollo, Bryant 4253!

PENDLETON. Did you get a good start with your scandal. [*Margaret hangs her head.*] It's no use; I'm convinced we're in a hopeless muddle.

MARGARET. I heartily agree with you.

PENDLETON. You've changed your mind very suddenly.

MARGARET. I have my reasons.

PENDLETON. The fact is, Margaret, that so long as we live together we're public figures, with everybody else as our jury.

MARGARET. But lots of people read your books and respect us.

PENDLETON. The people that respect us are worse than the people that don't.

MARGARET. If they wouldn't always be bothering about our morals!

PENDLETON. If we continue living together, we shall simply be giving up our freedom to prove we are free.

MARGARET [*faltering*]. I suppose we ought to separate.

PENDLETON. I believe we should.

MARGARET. We'll have to give up the studio.

PENDLETON [*regretfully*]. Yes.

MARGARET. It's taken a long time to make the place homelike.

PENDLETON. We've been very comfortable here.

MARGARET. I shall miss you at meals.

PENDLETON. I shall have to start eating at clubs and restaurants again, no more good home cooking.

MARGARET. We're kind of used to one another, aren't we?

PENDLETON. It isn't an easy matter to break, after five years.

MARGARET. And there are mighty few studios with as good a light as this; I don't want to separate if you don't.

PENDLETON. But, Margaret. [*Piano starts playing wedding march.*] There, that confounded piano again. [*Seized with an idea.*] Margaret, there's another way out!

MARGARET [*with same idea*]. You mean, we ought to marry!

PENDLETON. Yes, marry, and do it at once. That'll end everything.

MARGARET. Let's do it right away and get it over with; I simply must finish my Apollo.

PENDLETON. I'm going to buy you a new gown to get married in, a wedding present from Baroness de Meauville's.

MARGARET. I don't know that I want a De Meauville gown.

PENDLETON. Please let me. I want to give you something to symbolize our new life together.

MARGARET. Very well. And in return, I'll buy you a dictionary, so that I won't have to keep on correcting your spelling.

[*Exit Pendleton. Margaret goes to 'phone, and consults Fenton's card.*]

MARGARET. Bryant 4253? Can I speak to Mr. Fenton? [*Enter Mrs. Abbey.*] Mrs. Abbey. What do you think? We're going to get married!

MRS. ABBEY. Well, bless my soul! That's right. You can take it from me, ma'am, you'll find that respectability pays.

MARGARET [*at 'phone*]. Bryant 4253? [*Sweetly.*] Is that Mr. Fenton? [*Pause.*] Hello, Charley!

[*Curtain.*]

ARIA DA CAPO

A Play

By Edna St. Vincent Millay

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PERSONS

PIERROT.
COLUMBINE.
COTHURNUS [*masque of tragedy*].
THYRSIS [*shepherd*].
CORYDON [*shepherd*].

First printed in "Reedy's Mirror," St. Louis. Application to produce this play should be made to Edna St. Vincent Millay, in care of the Provincetown Players, 133 Macdougal Street, New York.

ARIA DA CAPO

A Play

By Edna St. Vincent Millay

[Scene: *A Stage. The curtain rises on a stage set for a Harlequinade, a merry black and white interior. Directly behind the footlights, and running parallel with them, is a long table, covered with a gay black and white cloth, on which is spread a banquet. At the opposite ends of this table, seated on delicate thin-legged chairs with high backs, are Pierrot and Columbine, dressed according to the tradition, excepting that Pierrot is in lilac, and Columbine in pink. They are dining.*]

Colu. Pierrot, a macaroon!
I cannot *live*
Without a macaroon!
Pier. My only love,
You are *so* intense . . . It is Tuesday,
Columbine? ——
I'll kiss you if it's Tuesday.
Colu. It is Wednesday,
If you must know. . . . Is this my artichoke,
Or yours?
Pier. Ah, Columbine,— as if it mattered!
Wednesday. . . . Will it be Tuesday, then, to-morrow,
By any chance?
Colu. To-morrow will be — Pierrot,
That isn't funny!
Pier. I thought it rather nice.
Well, let us drink some wine and lose our heads
And love each other.
Colu. Pierrot, don't you love Me now?
Pier. La, what a woman! — How should I know?
Pour me some wine: I'll tell you presently.
Colu. Pierrot, do you know, I think you drink too much.
Pier. Yes, I dare say I do. . . . Or else too little.
It's hard to tell. You see, I am always wanting
A little more than what I have,— or else
A little less. There's something wrong. My dear,
How many fingers have you?
Colu. La, indeed,
How should I know? — It always takes me one hand
To count the other with. It's too confusing.
Why?
Pier. Why? — I am a student, Columbine;
And search into all matters.
Colu. La, indeed? — Count them yourself, then!
Pier. No. Or, rather, nay.
'Tis of no consequence. . . . I am become
A painter, suddenly,— and you impress me —
Ah, yes! — six orange bull's-eyes, four green pin-wheels,
And one magenta jelly-roll,— the title
As follows: *Woman Taking In Cheese From Fire-Escape.*
Colu. Well, I like that! So that is all I've meant
To you!
Pier. Hush! All at once I am become
A pianist. I will image you in sound, . . .
On a new scale . . . without tonality . . .
Vivace senza tempo senza tutto. . . .
Title: *Uptown Express at Six O'Clock.*
Pour me a drink.
Colu. Pierrot, you work too hard.
You need a rest. Come on out into the garden,
And sing me something sad.

PIER. Don't stand so near me!
I am become a socialist. I love
Humanity; but I hate people. Columbine,
Put on your mittens, child; your hands are cold.
COLU. My hands are *not* cold.
PIER. Oh, I am sure they are.
And you must have a shawl to wrap about you,
And sit by the fire.
COLU. Why, I'll do no such thing!
I'm hot as a spoon in a tea-cup!
PIER. Columbine,
I'm a philanthropist. I know I am,
Because I feel so restless. Do not scream,
Or it will be the worse for you!
COLU. Pierrot,
My vinaigrette: I cannot *live* without
My vinaigrette!
PIER. My only love, you are
So fundamental! . . . How would you like to be
An actress, Columbine? — I am become
Your manager.
COLU. Why, Pierrot, *I* can't act.
PIER. Can't act! Can't act! La, listen to the woman!
What's that to do with the price of furs? — You're blonde,
Are you not? — You have no education, have you? —
Can't act! You under-rate yourself, my dear!
COLU. Yes, I suppose I do.
PIER. As for the rest,
I'll teach you how to cry, and how to die,
And other little tricks; and the house will love you.
You'll be a star by five o'clock . . . That is,
If you will let me pay for your apartment.
COLU. *Let* you? — well, that's a good one! Ha! Ha! Ha!
But why?
PIER. But why? — well, as to that, my dear,
I cannot say. It's just a matter of form.
COLU. Pierrot, I'm getting tired of caviar
And peacocks' livers. Isn't there something else
That people eat? — some humble vegetable,
That grows in the ground?
PIER. Well, there are mushrooms.
COLU. Mushrooms!
That's so! I had forgotten . . . mushrooms . . . mushrooms. . . .
I cannot *live* with. . . . How do you like this gown?
PIER. Not much. I'm tired of gowns that have the waist-line
About the waist, and the hem around the bottom,—
And women with their breasts in front of them! —
Zut and *ehé!* Where does one go from here!
COLU. Here's a persimmon, love. You always liked them.
PIER. I am become a critic; there is nothing I can enjoy. . . . However, set it aside;
I'll eat it between meals.
COLU. Pierrot, do you know,
Sometimes I think you're making fun of me.
PIER. My love, by yon black moon, you wrong us both.
COLU. There isn't a sign of a moon, Pierrot.
PIER. Of course not.
There never was. "Moon's" just a word to swear by,
"Mutton!"— now *there's* a thing you can lay the hands on,
And set the tooth in! Listen, Columbine:
I always lied about the moon and you.
Food is my only lust.
COLU. Well, eat it, then,
For heaven's sake, and stop your silly noise!
I haven't heard the clock tick for an hour.
PIER. It's ticking all the same. If you were a fly,
You would be dead by now. And if I were a parrot,
I could be talking for a thousand years!
[*Enters Cothurnus.*]
PIER. Hello, what's this, for God's sake? — What's the matter?
Say, whadda you mean? — get off the stage, my friend,
And pinch yourself,— you're walking in your sleep!

COTH. I never sleep.
PIER. Well, anyhow, clear out.
You don't belong on here. Wait for your own scene!
Whadda you think this is,— a dress-rehearsal?
COTH. Sir, I am tired of waiting. I will wait
No longer.
PIER. Well, but what are you going to do?
The scene is set for me!
COTH. True, sir; yet I
Can play the scene.
PIER. Your scene is down for later!
COTH. That, too, is true, sir; but I play it now.
PIER. Oh, very well! — Anyway, I am tired
Of black and white. At least, I think I am.
[*Exit Columbine.*]
Yes, I am sure I am. I know what I'll do! —
I'll go and strum the moon, that's what I'll do. . . .
Unless, perhaps, . . . you never can tell . . . I may be,
You know, tired of the moon. Well, anyway,
I'll go find Columbine. . . . And when I find her,
I will address her thus: "*Ehé* Pierrette!"—
There's something in that.
[*Exit Pierrot.*]
COTH. You, Thyrsis! Corydon! Where are you?
THYR. Sir, we are in our dressing-room!
COTH. Come out and do the scene.
CORY. You are mocking us! —
The scene is down for later.
COTH. That is true;
But we will play it now. I am the scene.
[*Seats himself on high place in back of stage. Enter Corydon and Thyrsis.*]
CORY. Sir, we were counting on this little hour.
We said, "Here is an hour,— in which to think
A mighty thought, and sing a trifling song,
And look at nothing."— And, behold! the hour,
Even as we spoke, was over, and the act begun,
Under our feet!
THYR. Sir, we are not in the fancy
To play the play. We had thought to play it later.
CORY. Besides, this is the setting for a farce.
Our scene requires a wall; we cannot build
A wall of tissue-paper!
THYR. We cannot act
A tragedy with comic properties!
COTH. Try it and see. I think you'll find you can.
One wall is like another. And regarding
The matter of your insufficient wood,
The important thing is that you speak the lines,
And make the gestures. Wherefore I shall remain
Throughout, and hold the prompt-book. Are you ready?
CORY.-THYR. [*sorrowfully*]. Sir, we are always ready.
COTH. Play the play!
[*Corydon and Thyrsis move the table and chairs to one side out of the way, and seat themselves in a half-reclining position on the floor, left of the center of the stage, propped up by crepe paper pillows and bolsters, in place of rocks.*]
THYR. How gently in the silence, Corydon,
Our sheep go up the bank. They crop a grass
That's yellow where the sun is out, and black
Where the clouds drag their shadows. Have you noticed
How steadily, yet with what a slanting eye
They graze?
CORY. As if they thought of other things.
What say you, Thyrsis, do they only question
Where next to pull? — Or do their far minds draw them
Thus vaguely north of west and south of east?

THYR. One cannot say. . . . The black lamb wears its burdocks
As if they were a garland,—have you noticed?—
Purple and white—and drinks the bitten grass
As if it were a wine.
CORY. I've noticed that.
What say you, Thyrsis, shall we make a song
About a lamb that thought himself a shepherd?
THYR. Why, yes!—that is, why,—no. (I have forgotten
My line.)
COTH. [*prompting*]. "I know a game worth two of that."
THYR. Oh, yes. . . . I know a game worth two of that:
Let's gather rocks, and build a wall between us;
And say that over there belongs to me,
And over here to you!
CORY. Why,—very well.
And say you may not come upon my side
Unless I say you may!
THYR. Nor you on mine!
And if you should, 'twould be the worse for you!
[*They weave a wall of colored crépe paper ribbons from the center front to the center back of the stage, fastening the ends to Columbine's chair in front and to Pierrot's chair in the back.*]
CORY. Now there's a wall a man may see across,
But not attempt to scale.
THYR. An excellent wall.
CORY. Come, let us separate, and sit alone
A little while, and lay a plot whereby
We may outdo each other.
[*They seat themselves on opposite sides of the wall.*]
PIER. [*off stage*]. Ehé, Pierrette!
COLU. [*off stage*]. My name is Columbine! Leave me alone!
THYR. [*coming up to the wall*].
Corydon, after all, and in spite of the fact
I started it myself, I do not like this
So very much. What is the sense of saying
I do not want you on my side the wall?
It is a silly game. I'd much prefer
Making the little song you spoke of making,
About the lamb, you know, that thought himself
A shepherd!—what do you say?
[*Pause.*]
CORY. [*at wall*]. (I have forgotten
The line)
COTH. [*prompting*]. "How do I know this isn't a trick"
CORY. Oh, yes. . . . How do I know this isn't a trick
To get upon my land?
THYR. Oh, Corydon,
You *know* it's not a trick. I do not like
The game, that's all. Come over here, or let me
Come over there.
CORY. It is a clever trick
To get upon my land.
[*Seats himself as before.*]
THYR. Oh, very well! [*Seats himself as before*] [*To himself.*] I think I never knew a sillier game.
CORY. [*coming to wall*].
Oh, Thyrsis, just a minute!—all the water
Is on your side the wall, and the sheep are thirsty.
I hadn't thought of that.
THYR. Oh, hadn't you?
CORY. Why, what do you mean?
THYR. What do I mean?—I mean
That I can play a game as well as you can.
And if the pool is on my side, it's on
My side, that's all.
CORY. You mean you'd let the sheep
Go thirsty?
THYR. Well, they're not my sheep. My sheep
Have water enough.
CORY. *Your* sheep! You are mad, to call them.
Yours—mine—they are all one flock!
Thyrsis, you can't mean
To keep the water from them, just because
They happened to be grazing over here
Instead of over there, when we set the wall up?
THYR. Oh, can't I?—wait and see!—and if you try
To lead them over here, you'll wish you hadn't!

CORY. I wonder how it happens all the water
Is on your side. . . . I'll say you had an eye out
For lots of little things, my innocent friend,
When I said, "Let us make a song," and you said,
"I know a game worth two of that!"
COLU. [*off stage*].
D'you know, I think you must be getting old,
Or fat, or something,—stupid, anyway!—
Can't you put on some other kind of collar?
THYR. You know as well as I do, Corydon,
I never thought of anything of the kind.
Don't you?
CORY. I *do* not.
THYR. Don't you?
CORY. Oh, I suppose so.
Thyrsis, let's drop this,—what do you say?—it's only
A game, you know . . . we seem to be forgetting
It's only a game . . . a pretty serious game
It's getting to be, when one of us is willing
To let the sheep go thirsty, for the sake of it.
THYR. I know it, Corydon.
[*They reach out their arms to each other across the wall.*]
COTH. [*prompting*]. "But how do I know?"
THYR. Oh, yes. . . . But how do I know this isn't a trick
To water your sheep, and get the laugh on me?
CORY. You can't know, that's the difficult thing about it,
Of course,—you can't be sure. You have to take
My word for it. And I know just how you feel.
But one of us has to take a risk, or else,
Why don't you see?—the game goes on forever—
It's terrible, when you stop to think of it. . . .
Oh, Thyrsis, now for the first time I feel
This wall is actually a wall, a thing
Come up between us, shutting me away
From you. . . . I do not know you any more!
THYR. No, don't say that! Oh, Corydon, I'm willing
To drop it all, if you will! Come on over
And water your sheep! It is an ugly game.
I hate it from the first. . . . How did it start?
CORY. I do not know . . . I do not know . . . I think
I am afraid of you!—you are a stranger!
I never set eyes on you before! "Come over
And water my sheep," indeed!—They'll be more thirsty
Then they are now, before I bring them over
Into your land, and have you mixing them up
With yours, and calling them yours, and trying to keep them!
[*Enter Columbine.*]
COLU. [*to Cothurnus*]. Glummy, I want my hat.
THYR. Take it, and go.
COLU. Take it and go, indeed! Is it my hat,
Or isn't it? Is this my scene, or not?
Take it and go! Really, you know, you two
Are awfully funny!
[*Exit Columbine.*]
THYR. Corydon, my friend,
I'm going to leave you now, and whittle me
A pipe, or sing a song, or go to sleep.
When you have come to your senses, let me know.
[*Goes back to where he has been sitting, lies down and sleeps.*]
[*Corydon, in going back to where he has been sitting, stumbles over bowl of colored confetti and colored paper ribbins.*]
CORY. Why, what is this?—Red stones—and purple stones—
And stones stuck full of gold!—The ground is full
Of gold and colored stones! . . . I'm glad the wall
Was up before I found them!—Otherwise,

I should have had to share them. As it is,
They all belong to me. . . . Unless — [*He goes to wall and digs up and down the length of it, to see if there are jewels on the other side.*] None here —
None here — none here — They all belong to me!
[*Sits.*]

THYR. [*awakening*]. How curious! I thought the little black lamb
Came up and licked my hair! I saw the wool
About its neck as plain as anything!
It must have been a dream. The little black lamb
Is on the other side of the wall, I'm sure.
[*Goes to wall and looks over. Corydon is seated on the ground, tossing the confetti up into the air and catching it.*]
Hello, what's that you've got there, Corydon?

CORY. Jewels.

THYR. Jewels? — And where did you ever get them?

CORY. Oh, over here.

THYR. You mean to say you found them,
By digging around in the ground for them?

CORY. [*unpleasantly*]. No, Thyrsis.
By digging down for water for my sheep.

THYR. Corydon, come to the wall a minute, will you?
I want to talk to you.

CORY. I haven't time.
I'm making me a necklace of red stones.

THYR. I'll give you all the water that you want,
For one of those red stones,— if it's a good one.

CORY. Water? — what for? — what do I want of water?

THYR. Why, for your sheep.

CORY. My sheep? — I'm not a shepherd!

THYR. Your sheep are dying of thirst.

CORY. Man, haven't I told you
I can't be bothered with a few untidy
Brown sheep all full of burdocks? — I'm a merchant,
That's what I am! — And I set my mind to it,
I dare say I could be an emperor!
[*To himself.*] Wouldn't I be a fool to spend my time
Watching a flock of sheep go up a hill,
When I have these to play with — when I have these
To think about? — I can't make up my mind
Whether to buy a city, and have a thousand
Beautiful girls to bathe me, and be happy
Until I die, or build a bridge, and name it
The Bridge of Corydon,— and be remembered
After I'm dead.

THYR. Corydon, come to the wall,
Won't you? — I want to tell you something.

CORY. Hush!
Be off! Be off! Go finish your nap, I tell you!

THYR. Corydon, listen: If you don't want your sheep,
Give them to me.

CORY. Be off. Go finish your nap.
A red one — and a blue one — and a red one —
And a purple one — give you my sheep, did you say? —
Come, come! What do you take me for, a fool?
I've a lot of thinking to do,— and while I'm thinking,
The sheep might just as well be over here
As over there. . . . A blue one — and a red one —

THYR. But they will die!

CORY. And a green one — and a couple
Of white ones, for a change.

THYR. Maybe I have
Some jewels on my side.

CORY. And another green one —
Maybe, but I don't think so. You see, this rock
Isn't so very wide. It stops before
It gets to the wall. It seems to go quite deep,
However.

THYR. [*with hatred*]. I see.

COLU. [*off stage*]. Look, Pierrot, there's the moon!

PIER. [*off stage*]. Nonsense!
THYR. I see.
COLU. [*off stage*]. Sing me an old song, Pierrot,—
Something I can remember.
PIER. [*off stage*]. Columbine,
Your mind is made of crumbs,—like an escallop
Of oysters,—first a layer of crumbs, and then
An oystery taste, and then a layer of crumbs.
THYR. I find no jewels . . . but I wonder what
The root of this black weed would do to a man
If he should taste it . . . I have seen a sheep die,
With half the stalk still drooling from its mouth.
'Twould be a speedy remedy, I should think,
For a festered pride and a feverish ambition.
It has a curious root. I think I'll hack it
In little pieces. . . . First I'll get me a drink;
And then I'll hack that root in little pieces
As small as dust, and see what the color is
Inside. [*Goes to bowl on floor.*]
The pool is very clear. I see
A shepherd standing on the brink, with a red cloak
About him, and a black weed in his hand. . . .
'Tis I. [*Kneels and drinks.*]
CORY. [*Coming to wall*]. Hello, what are you doing, Thyrsis?
THYR. Digging for gold.
CORY. I'll give you all the gold
You want, if you'll give me a bowl of water.
If you don't want too much, that is to say.
THYR. Ho, so you've changed your mind?—It's different,
Isn't it, when you want a drink yourself?
CORY. Of course it is.
THYR. Well, let me see . . . a bowl
Of water,—come back in an hour, Corydon. I'm busy now.
CORY. Oh, Thyrsis, give me a bowl
Of water!—and I'll find the bowl with jewels,
And bring it back!
THYR. Be off, I'm busy now.
[*He catches sight of the weed, picks it up and looks at it, unseen by Corydon.*]
Wait!—Pick me out the finest stones you have . . .
I'll bring you a drink of water presently.
CORY. [*goes back and sits down, with the jewels before him*].
A bowl of jewels is a lot of jewels.
THYR. [*chopping up the weed*]. I wonder if it has a bitter taste?
CORY. There's sure to be a stone or two among them
I have grown fond of, pouring them from one hand
Into the other.
THYR. I hope it doesn't taste
Too bitter, just at first.
CORY. A bowl of jewels
Is far too many jewels to give away. . . .
And not get back again.
THYR. I don't believe
He'll notice. He's thirsty. He'll gulp it down
And never notice.
CORY. There ought to be some way
To get them back again. . . . I could give him a necklace,
And snatch it back, after I'd drunk the water,
I suppose. . . . why, as for that, of course, a *necklace*. . . .
[*He puts two or three of the colored tapes together and tries their strength by pulling them, after which he puts them around his neck and pulls them, gently, nodding to himself. He gets up and goes to the wall, with the colored tapes in his hands.*
Thyrsis in the meantime has poured the powdered root—black confetti—into the pot which contains the flower and filled it up with wine from the punch-bowl on the floor. He comes to the wall at the same time, holding the bowl of poison.]
THYR. Come and get your bowl of water, Corydon.

CORY. Ah, very good! — and for such a gift as that
I'll give you more than a bowl of unset stones.
I'll give you three long necklaces, my friend.
Come closer. Here they are. [*Puts the ribbons about Thyrsis' neck.*]
THYR. [*putting bowl to Corydon's mouth*]. I'll hold the bowl
Until you've drunk it all.
CORY. Then hold it steady.
For every drop you spill I'll have a stone back
Out of this chain.
THYR. I shall not spill a drop.
[*Corydon drinks, meanwhile beginning to strangle Thyrsis.*]
THYR. Don't pull the string so tight.
CORY. You're spilling the water.
THYR. You've had enough — you've had enough — stop pulling
The string so tight!
CORY. Why, that's not tight at all. . . .
How's this?
THYR. [*drops bowl*]. You're strangling me! Oh, Corydon!
It's only a game! — and you are strangling me!
CORY. It's only a game, is it? — Yet I believe
You've poisoned me in earnest!
[*Writhes and pulls the strings tighter, winding them about Thyrsis' neck.*]
THYR. Corydon! [*Dies.*]
CORY. You've poisoned me in earnest. . . . I feel so cold. . . .
So cold. . . . this is a very silly game. . . .
Why do we play it? — let's not play this game
A minute more. . . . let's make a little song
About a lamb. . . . I'm coming over the wall,
No matter what you say,— I want to be near you. . . .
[*Groping his way, with arms wide before him, he strides through the frail papers of the wall without knowing it, and continues seeking for the wall straight across the stage.*]
Where is the wall?
[*Gropes his way back, and stands very near Thyrsis without knowing it; he speaks slowly.*]
There isn't any wall, I think.
[*Takes a step forward, his foot touches Thyrsis' body, and he falls down beside him.*]
Thyrsis, where is your cloak? — just give me
A little bit of your cloak! . . .
[*Draws corner of Thyrsis' cloak over his shoulders, falls across Thyrsis' body, and dies.*]
Cothurnus closes the prompt-book with a bang, arises matter-of-factly, comes down stage, and places the table over the two bodies, drawing down the cover so that they are hidden from any actors on the stage, but visible to the audience, pushing in their feet and hands with his boot. He then turns his back to the audience, and claps his hands twice.]
COTH. Strike the scene!
[*Exit Cothurnus. Enter Pierrot and Columbine.*]
PIER. Don't puff so, Columbine!
COLU. Lord, what a mess
This set is in! If there's one thing I hate
Above everything else,— even more than getting my feet wet —
It's clutter! — He might at least have left the scene
The way he found it. . . . don't you say so, Pierrot?
[*She picks up punch bowl. They arrange chairs as before at ends of table.*]
PIER. Well, I don't know. I think it rather diverting
The way it is.
[*Yawns, picks up confetti bowl.*]
Shall we begin?
COLU. [*screams*]. My God!
What's that there under the table?
PIER. It is the bodies
Of the two shepherds from the other play.
COLU. [*slowly*]. How curious to strangle him like that,
With colored paper ribbons!
PIER. Yes, and yet
I dare say he is just as dead.
[*Pause. Calls Cothurnus.*]

Come drag these bodies out of here! We can't
Sit down and eat with two dead bodies lying
Under the table! . . . The audience wouldn't stand for it!

COTH. [*off stage*]. What makes you think so? — Pull down the tablecloth
On the other play, and hide them from the house,
And play the farce. The audience will forget.

PIER. That's so. Give me a hand there, Columbine.

[*Pierrot and Columbine pull down the table cover in such a way that the two bodies are hidden from the house, then merrily set their bowls back on the table, draw up their chairs, and begin the play exactly as before, speaking even more rapidly and artificially.*]

COLU. Pierrot, a macaroon,— I cannot *live*
Without a macaroon!

PIER. My only love,
You are *so* intense! . . . Is it Tuesday, Columbine? —
I'll kiss you if it's Tuesday.

[*Curtains begin to close slowly.*]

COLU. It is Wednesday,
If you must know. . . . Is this my artichoke,
Or yours?

PIER. Ah, Columbine, as if it mattered!
Wednesday. . . . Will it be Tuesday, then to-morrow,
By any chance?

[*Curtain.*]

HELENA'S HUSBAND

An Historical Comedy

By Philip Moeller

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CHARACTERS

HELENA, *the Queen.*
TSUMU, *a black woman, slave to Helena.*
MENELAUS, *the King.*
ANALYTIKOS, *the King's librarian.*
PARIS, *a shepherd.*

HELENA'S HUSBAND was first produced by the Washington Square Players, under the direction of Mr. Moeller, at the Bandbox Theatre, New York, on the night of October 4, 1915, with the following cast:

HELENA [*Queen of Sparta*]	*Noel Haddon.*
TSUMU [*the slave*]	*Helen Westley.*
MENELAUS [*the King*]	*Frank Conroy.*
ANALYTIKOS [*his librarian*]	*Walter Frankl.*
PARIS [*a shepherd*]	*Harold Meltzer.*

The scene was designed by Paul T. Frankl and the costumes by Robert Locker.

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HELENA'S HUSBAND

AN HISTORICAL COMEDY

BY PHILIP MOELLER

[SCENE *is that archæological mystery, a Greek interior. A door on the right leads to the King's library, one on the left to the apartment of the Queen. Back right is the main entrance leading to the palace. Next this, running the full length of the wall, is a window with a platform, built out over the main court. Beyond is a view of hills bright with lemon groves, and in the far distance shimmers the sea. On the wall near the Queen's room hangs an old shield rusty with disuse. A bust of Zeus stands on a pedestal against the right wall. There are low coffers about the room from which hang the ends of vivid colored robes. The scene is bathed in intense sunlight. Tsumu is massaging the Queen.*]

HELENA. There's no doubt about it.

TSUMU. Analytikos says there is much doubt about all things.

HELENA. Never mind what he says. I envy you your complexion.

TSUMU [*falling prostrate before Helena*]. Whom the Queen envies should beware.

HELENA [*annoyed*]. Get up, Tsumu. You make me nervous tumbling about like that.

TSUMU [*still on floor*]. Why does the great Queen envy Tsumu?

HELENA. Get up, you silly. [*She kicks her.*] I envy you because you can run about and never worry about getting sunburnt.

TSUMU [*on her knees*]. The radiant beauty of the Queen is unspoilable.

HELENA. That's just what's worrying me, Tsumu. When beauty is so perfect the slightest jar may mean a jolt. [*She goes over and looks at her reflection in the shield.*] I can't see myself as well as I would like to. The King's shield is tarnished. Menelaus has been too long out of battle.

TSUMU [*handing her a hand mirror*]. The Gods will keep Sparta free from strife.

HELENA. I'll have you beaten if you assume that prophetic tone with me. There's one thing I can't stand, and that's a know-all.

[*Flinging the hand mirror to the floor.*]

TSUMU [*in alarm*]. Gods grant you haven't bent it.

HELENA. These little mirrors are useless. His shield is the only thing in which I can see myself full-length. If he only went to war, he'd have to have it cleaned.

TSUMU [*putting the mirror on a table near the Queen*]. The King is a lover of peace.

HELENA. The King is a lover of comfort. Have you noticed that he spends more time than he used to in the library?

TSUMU. He is busy with questions of State.

HELENA. You know perfectly well that when anything's the matter with the Government it's always straightened out at the other end of the palace. Finish my shoulder. [*She examines her arm.*] I doubt if there is a finer skin than this in Sparta.

[*Tsumu begins to massage the Queen's shoulder.*]

HELENA [*taking up a mirror*]. That touch of deep carmine right here in the center of my lips was quite an idea.

TSUMU [*busily pounding the Queen*]. An inspiration of the Gods!

HELENA. The Gods have nothing to do with it. I copied it from a low woman I saw at the circus. I can't understand how these bad women have such good ideas.

[*Helen twists about.*]

TSUMU. If your majesty doesn't sit still, I may pinch you.

HELENA [*boxing her ears*]. None of your tricks, you ebony fiend!

TSUMU [*crouching*]. Descendant of paradise, forgive me.

HELENA. If you bruise my perfect flesh, the King will kill you. My beauty is his religion. He can sit for hours, as if at prayer, just examining the arch of my foot. Tsumu, you may kiss my foot.

TSUMU [*prostrate*]. May the Gods make me worthy of your kindness!

HELENA. That's enough. Tsumu, are you married?

TSUMU [*getting up*]. I've been so busy having babies I never had time to get married.

HELENA. It's a great disillusionment.

TSUMU [*agast*]. What!

HELENA. I'm not complaining. Moo Moo is the best of husbands, but sometimes being adored too much is trying. [*She sighs deeply.*] I think I'll wear my heliotrope this afternoon.

[*A trumpet sounds below in the courtyard. Tsumu goes to the window.*]

TSUMU. They are changing the guards at the gates of the palace. It's almost time for your bath.

[*She begins scraping the massage ointment back into the box.*]

HELENA. You're as careful with that ointment as Moo Moo is with me.

TSUMU. Precious things need precious guarding.

HELENA. It's very short-sighted on Moo Moo's part to send everybody to the galleys who dares lift a head when I pass by — and all these nice-looking soldiers! Why — the only men I ever see besides Moo Moo are Analytikos and a lot of useless eunuchs.

TSUMU. Oh, those eunuchs!

HELENA [*as she sits dreaming*]. I wish, I wish —

[*She stops short.*]

TSUMU. You have but to speak your desire to the King.

HELENA [*shocked*]. Tsumu! How can you think of such a thing? I'm not a bad woman.

TSUMU. He would die for you.

HELENA [*relieved*]. Ah! Do you think so, Tsumu?

TSUMU. All Sparta knows that His Majesty is a lover of peace, and yet he would rush into battle to save you.

HELENA. I should love to have men fighting for me.

TSUMU [*in high alarm*]. May Zeus turn a deaf ear to your voice.

HELENA. Don't be impertinent, Tsumu. I've got to have some sort of amusement.

TSUMU. You've only to wait till next week, and you can see another of the priestesses sacrificed to Diana.

HELENA. That doesn't interest me any longer. The girls are positively beginning to like it. No! My mind is set on war.

TSUMU [*terrified*]. I have five fathers of my children to lose.

HELENA. War, or — or —

TSUMU [*hopefully*]. Have I been so long your slave that I no longer know your wish?

HELENA [*very simply*]. Well, I should like to have a lover.

TSUMU [*springs up and rushes over in horror to draw the curtains across the door of the library. All of a tremble*]. Gods grant they didn't hear you.

HELENA. Don't be alarmed, Tsumu. Analytikos is over eighty.

[*She bursts into a loud peal of laughter and Menelaus rushes into the room.*]

MENELAUS [*in high irritation*]. I wish you wouldn't make so much noise in here. A King might at least expect quiet in his own palace.

HELENA. Tsumu, see if my bath is ready. [*Tsumu exits.*] You used not speak like that to me, Moo Moo.

MENELAUS [*in a temper*]. How many times must I tell you that my name is Menelaus and that it isn't "Moo Moo"?

HELENA [*sweetly*]. I'll never do it again, Moo Moo. [*She giggles.*]

MENELAUS. Your laugh gets on my nerves. It's louder than it used to be.

HELENA. If you wish it, I'll never, never laugh again.

MENELAUS. You've promised that too often.

HELENA [*sadly*]. Things are not as they used to be.

MENELAUS. Are you going to start that again?

HELENA [*with a tinge of melancholy*]. I suppose you'd like me to be still and sad.

MENELAUS [*bitterly*]. Is it too much to hope that you might be still and happy?

HELENA [*speaking very quickly and tragically*]. Don't treat me cruelly, Moo Moo. You don't understand me. No man ever really understands a woman. There are terrible depths to my nature. I had a long talk with Dr. Æsculapius only last week, and he told me I'm too introspective. It's the curse of us emotional women. I'm really quite worried, but much you care, much you care. [*A note of tears comes into her voice.*] I'm sure you don't love me any more, Moo Moo. No! No! Don't answer me! If you did you couldn't speak to me the way you do. I've never wronged you in deed or in thought. No, never — never. I've given up my hopes and aspirations, because I knew you wanted me around you. And now, NOW — [*She can contain the tears no longer.*] Because I have neglected my beauty and because I am old and ugly, you regret that Ulysses or Agamemnon didn't marry me when you all wanted me, and I know you curse the day you ever saw me.

[*She is breathless.*]

MENELAUS [*fuming*]. Well! Have you done?

HELENA. No. I could say a great deal more, but I'm not a talkative woman.

[*Analytikos comes in from the library.*]

ANALYTIKOS. Your Majesty, are we to read no longer to-day?

HELENA. I have something to say to the King.

[*Analytikos goes toward the library. Menelaus anxiously stops him.*]

MENELAUS. No. Stay here. You are a wise man and well understand the wisdom of the Queen.

ANALYTIKOS [*bowing to Helena*]. Helena is wise as she is beautiful.

MENELAUS. She is attempting to prove to me in a thousand words that she's a silent woman.

ANALYTIKOS. Women are seldom silent. [*Helen resents this.*] Their beauty is forever speaking for them.

HELENA. The years have, indeed, taught you wisdom.

[*Tsumu enters.*]

TSUMU. The almond water awaits your majesty.

HELENA. I hope you haven't forgotten the chiropodist.

TSUMU. He has been commanded but he's always late. He's so busy.

HELENA [*in a purring tone to Menelaus*]. Moo Moo.

[*Menelaus, bored, turns away.*]

HELENA [*to Tsumu*]. I think after all I'll wear my Sicily blue.

[*She and Tsumu go into the Queen's apartment.*]

ANALYTIKOS. Shall we go back to the library?

MENELAUS. My mind is unhinged again — that woman with her endless protestations.

ANALYTIKOS. I am sorry the poets no longer divert you.

MENELAUS. A little poetry is always too much.

ANALYTIKOS. To-morrow we will try the historians.

MENELAUS. No! Not the historians. I want the truth for a change.

ANALYTIKOS. The truth!

MENELAUS. Where in books can I find escape from the grim reality of being hitched for life to such a wife? Bah!

ANALYTIKOS. Philosophy teaches —

MENELAUS. Why have the Gods made woman necessary to man, and made them fools?

ANALYTIKOS. For seventy years I have been resolving the problem of woman and even at my age —

MENELAUS. Give it up, old man. The answer is — don't.

ANALYTIKOS. Such endless variety, and yet —

MENELAUS [*with the conviction of finality*]. There are only two sorts of women! Those who are failures and those who realize it.

ANALYTIKOS. Is not Penelope, the model wife of your cousin Ulysses, an exception?

MENELAUS. Duty is the refuge of the unbeautiful. She is as commonplace as she is ugly. [*And then with deep bitterness.*] Why didn't *he* marry Helen when we all wanted her? He was too wise for that. He is the only man I've ever known who seems able to direct destiny.

ANALYTIKOS. You should not blame the Gods for a lack of will.

MENELAUS [*shouting*]. Will! Heaven knows I do not lack the will to rid myself of this painted puppet, but where is the instrument ready to my hand?

[*At this moment a Shepherd of Apollonian beauty leaps across the rail of the balcony and bounds into the room. Menelaus and Analytikos start back in amazement.*]

ANALYTIKOS. Who are you?

PARIS. An adventurer.

ANALYTIKOS. Then you have reached the end of your story. In a moment you will die.

PARIS. I have no faith in prophets.

ANALYTIKOS. The soldiers of the King will give you faith. Don't you know that it means death for any man to enter the apartments of the Queen?

PARIS [*looking from one to the other*]. Oh! So you're a couple of eunuchs.

[*Though nearly eighty this is too much for Analytikos to bear. He rushes to call the guard, but Menelaus stops him.*]

PARIS [*to Analytikos*]. Thanks.

ANALYTIKOS. You thank me for telling you your doom?

PARIS. No — for convincing me that I'm where I want to be. It's taken me a long while, but I knew I'd get here. [*And then very intimately to Menelaus.*] Where's the Queen?

MENELAUS. Where do you come from?

PARIS. From the hills. I had come down into the market-place to sell my sheep. I had my hood filled with apples. They were golden-red like a thousand sunsets.

MENELAUS [*annoyed*]. You might skip those bucolic details.

PARIS. At the fair I met three ancient gypsies.

MENELAUS. What have they to do with you coming here?

PARIS. You don't seem very patient. Can't I tell my story in my own way? They asked me for the apple I was eating and I asked them what they'd give for it.

MENELAUS. I'm not interested in market quotations.

PARIS. You take everything so literally. I'm sure you're easily bored.

MENELAUS [*with meaning*]. I am.

PARIS [*going on cheerfully*]. The first was to give me all the money she could beg, and the second was to tell me all the truth she could learn by listening, and the third promised me a pretty girl. So I chose —

[*He hesitates.*]

ANALYTIKOS. You cannot escape by spinning out your tale.

PARIS. Death is the end of one story and the beginning of another.

MENELAUS. Well! Well! Come to the point. Which did you choose?

PARIS [*smiling*]. Well, you see I'd been in the hills for a long while, so I picked the girl.

ANALYTIKOS. It would have been better for you if you had chosen wisdom.

PARIS. I knew you'd say that.

ANALYTIKOS. I have spoken truly. In a moment you will die.

PARIS. It is because the old have forgotten life that they preach wisdom.

MENELAUS. So you chose the girl? Well, go on.

PARIS. This made the other cronies angry, and when I tossed her the apple one of the others yelped at me: "You may as well seek the Queen of Sparta: she is the fairest of women." And as I turned away I heard their laughter, but the words had set my heart aflame and though it cost me my life, I'll follow the adventure.

ANALYTIKOS [*scandalized*]. Haven't we heard enough of this?

MENELAUS [*deeply*]. No! I want to hear how the story ends. It may amuse the King.

[*He makes a sign to Analytikos.*]

PARIS. And on the ship at night I looked long at the stars and dreamed of possessing Helen.

[*Analytikos makes an involuntary movement toward the balcony, but Menelaus stops him.*]

PARIS. Desire has been my guiding Mercury; the Fates are with me, and here I am.

ANALYTIKOS. The wrath of the King will show you no mercy.

PARIS [*nonchalantly*]. I'm not afraid of the King. He's fat, and — a fool.

ANALYTIKOS. Shall I call the guards?

[*Menelaus stops him.*]

MENELAUS [*very significantly*]. So you would give your life for a glimpse of the Queen?

PARIS [*swiftly*]. Yes! My immortal soul, and if the fables tell the truth, the sight will be worth the forfeit.

MENELAUS [*suddenly jumping up*]. It shall be as you wish!

PARIS [*buoyantly*]. Venus has smiled on me.

MENELAUS. In there beyond the library you will find a room with a bath. Wait there till I call you.

PARIS. Is this some trick to catch me?

MENELAUS. A Spartan cannot lie.

PARIS. What will happen to you if the King hears of this?

MENELAUS. I will answer for the king. Go.

[*Paris exits into the library.*]

ANALYTIKOS [*rubbing his hands*]. Shall I order the boiling oil?

MENELAUS [*surprised*]. Oil?

ANALYTIKOS. Now that he is being cleaned for the sacrifice.

MENELAUS. His torture will be greater than being boiled alive.

ANALYTIKOS [*eagerly*]. You'll have him hurled from the wall of the palace to a forest of waiting spears below?

MENELAUS. None is so blind as he who sees too much.

ANALYTIKOS. Your majesty is subtle in his cruelty.

MENELAUS. Haven't the years taught you the cheapness of revenge?

ANALYTIKOS [*mystified*]. You do not intend to alter destiny.

MENELAUS. Never before has destiny been so clear to me.

ANALYTIKOS. Then the boy must die.

MENELAUS [*with slow determination*]. No! He has been sent by the Gods to save me!

ANALYTIKOS. Your majesty!

[*He is trembling with apprehension.*]

MENELAUS [*with unbudgeable conviction*]. Helena must elope with him!

ANALYTIKOS [*falling into a seat*]. Ye Gods!

MENELAUS [*quietly*]. I couldn't divorce the Queen. That would set a bad example.

ANALYTIKOS. Yes, very.

MENELAUS. I couldn't desert her. That would be beneath my honor.

ANALYTIKOS [*deeply*]. Was there no other way?

MENELAUS [*pompously*]. The King can do no wrong, and besides I hate the smell of blood. Are you a prophet as well as a scholar? Will she go?

ANALYTIKOS. To-night I will read the stars.

MENELAUS [*meaningfully*]. By to-night I'll not need you to tell me. [*Analytikos sits deep in thought.*] Well?

ANALYTIKOS. Ethics cite no precedent.

MENELAUS. Do you mean to say I'm not justified?

ANALYTIKOS [*cogitating*]. Who can establish the punctilious ratio between necessity and desire?

MENELAUS [*beginning to fume*]. This is no time for language. Just put yourself in my place.

ANALYTIKOS. Being you, how can I judge as I?

MENELAUS [*losing control*]. May you choke on your dialectics! Zeus himself could have stood it no longer.

ANALYTIKOS. Have you given her soul a chance to grow?

MENELAUS. Her soul, indeed! It's shut in her rouge pot. [*He has been strutting about. Suddenly he sits down crushing a roll of papyrus. He takes it up and in utter disgust reads.*] "The perfect hip, its development and permanence." Bah! [*He flings it to the floor.*] I've done what I had to do, and Gods grant the bait may be sweet enough to catch the Queen.

ANALYTIKOS. If you had diverted yourself with a war or two you might have forgotten your troubles at home.

MENELAUS [*frightened*]. I detest dissension of any kind — my dream was perpetual peace in comfortable domesticity with a womanly woman to warm my sandals.

ANALYTIKOS. Is not the Queen — ?

MENELAUS. No! No! The whole world is but her mirror. And I'm expected to face that woman every morning at breakfast for the rest of my life, and by Venus that's more than even a King can bear!

ANALYTIKOS. Even a King cannot alter destiny. I warn you, whom the Gods have joined together —

MENELAUS [*in an outburst*]. Is for man to break asunder!

ANALYTIKOS [*deeply shocked*]. You talk like an atheist.

MENELAUS. I never allow religion to interfere with life. Go call the victim and see that he be left alone with the Queen.

[*Menelaus exits and Analytikos goes over to the door of the library and summons Paris, who enters clad in a gorgeous robe.*]

PARIS. I found this in there. It looks rather well, doesn't it? Ah! So you're alone. I suppose that stupid friend of yours has gone to tell the King. When do I see the Queen?

ANALYTIKOS. At once.

[*He goes to the door of the Queen's apartment and claps his hand. Tsumu enters and at the sight of her Paris recoils the full length of the room.*]

PARIS. I thought the Queen was a blonde!

ANALYTIKOS. Tell Her Majesty a stranger awaits her here.

[*Tsumu exits, her eyes wide on Paris.*]

You should thank the Gods for this moment.

PARIS [*his eyes on the door*]. You do it for me. I can never remember all their names.

[*Helena enters clad in her Sicily blue, crowned with a garland of golden flowers. She and Paris stand riveted, looking at each other. Their attitude might be described as fantastic. Analytikos watches them for a moment and then with hands and head lifted to heaven he goes into the library.*]

PARIS [*quivering with emotion*]. I have the most strange sensation of having seen you before. Something I can't explain —

HELENA [*quite practically*]. Please don't bother about all sorts of fine distinctions. Under the influence of Analytikos and my husband, life has become a mess of indecision. I'm a simple, direct woman and I expect you to say just what you think.

PARIS. Do you? Very well, then — [*He comes a step nearer to her.*] Fate is impelling me toward you.

HELENA. Yes. That's much better. So you're a fatalist. It's very Greek. I don't see what our dramatists would do without it.

PARIS. In my country there are no dramatists. We are too busy with reality.

HELENA. Your people must be uncivilized barbarians.

PARIS. My people are a genuine people. There is but one thing we worship.

HELENA. Don't tell me it's money.

PARIS. It's —

HELENA. Analytikos says if there weren't any money, there wouldn't be any of those ridiculous socialists.

PARIS. It isn't money. It's sincerity.

HELENA. I, too, believe in sincerity. It's the loveliest thing in the world.

PARIS. And the most dangerous.

HELENA. The truth is never dangerous.

PARIS. Except when told.

HELENA [*making room on the couch for him to sit next to her*]. You mustn't say wicked things to me.

PARIS. Can your theories survive a test?

HELENA [*beautifully*]. Truth is eternal and survives all tests.

PARIS. No. Perhaps, after all, your soul is not ready for the supremest heights.

HELENA. Do you mean to say I'm not religious? Religion teaches the meaning of love.

PARIS. Has it taught you to love your husband?

HELENA [*starting up and immediately sitting down again*]. How dare you speak to me like that?

PARIS. You see. I was right.

[*He goes toward the balcony.*]

HELENA [*stopping him*]. Whatever made you think so?

PARIS. I've heard people talk of the King. You could never love a man like that.

HELENA [*beautifully*]. A woman's first duty is to love her husband.

PARIS. There is a higher right than duty.

HELENA [*with conviction*]. Right is right.

PARIS [*with admiration*]. The world has libeled you.

HELENA. Me! The Queen?

PARIS. You are as wise as you are beautiful.

HELENA [*smiling coyly*]. Why, you hardly know me.

PARIS. I know you! I, better than all men.

HELENA. You?

PARIS [*rupturously*]. Human law has given you to Menelaus, but divine law makes you mine.

HELENA [*in amazement*]. What!

PARIS. I alone appreciate your beauty. I alone can reach your soul.

HELENA. Ah!

PARIS. You hate your husband!

HELENA [*drawing back*]. Why do you look at me like that?

PARIS. To see if there's one woman in the world who dares tell the truth.

HELENA. My husband doesn't understand me.

PARIS [*with conviction*]. I knew you detested him.

HELENA. He never listens to my aspirations.

PARIS. Egoist.

HELENA [*assuming an irresistible pose*]. I'm tired of being only lovely. He doesn't realize the meaning of spiritual intercourse, of soul communion.

PARIS. Fool!

HELENA. You dare call Moo Moo a fool?

PARIS. Has he not been too blind to see that your soul outshines your beauty? [*Then, very dramatically.*] You're stifling!

HELENA [*clearing her throat*]. I — I —

PARIS. He has made you sit upon your wings. [*Helena, jumping up, shifts her position.*] You are groping in the darkness.

HELENA. Don't be silly. It's very light in here.

PARIS [*undisturbed*]. You are stumbling, and I have come to lead you.

[*He steps toward her.*]

HELENA. Stop right there! [*Paris stops.*] No man but the King can come within ten feet of me. It's a court tradition.

PARIS. Necessity knows no tradition. [*He falls on his knees before her.*] I shall come close to you, though the flame of your beauty consume me.

HELENA. You'd better be careful what you say to me. Remember I'm the Queen.

PARIS. No man weighs his words who has but a moment to live.

HELENA. You said that exactly like an actor. [*He leans very close to her.*] What are you doing now?

PARIS. I am looking into you. You are the clear glass in which I read the secret of the universe.

HELENA. The secret of the universe. Ah! Perhaps you could understand me.

PARIS. First you must understand yourself.

HELENA [*instinctively taking up a mirror*]. How?

PARIS. You must break with all this prose. [*With an unconscious gesture he sweeps a tray of toilet articles from the table. Helena emits a little shriek.*]

HELENA. The ointment!

PARIS [*rushing to the window and pointing to the distance*]. And climb to infinite poesie!

HELENA [*catching his enthusiasm, says very blandly*]. There is nothing in the world like poetry.

PARIS [*lyrically*]. Have you ever heard the poignant breathing of the stars?

HELENA. No. I don't believe in astrology.

PARIS. Have you ever smelt the powdery mists of the sun?

HELENA. I should sneeze myself to death.

PARIS. Have you ever listened to the sapphire soul of the sea?

HELENA. Has the sea a soul? But please don't stop talking. You do it so beautifully.

PARIS. Deeds are sweeter than words. Shall we go hand in hand to meet eternity?

HELENA [*not comprehending him*]. That's very pretty. Say it again.

PARIS [*passionately*]. There's but a moment of life left me. I shall stifle it in ecstasy. Helena, Helena, I adore you!

HELENA [*jumping up in high surprise*]. You're not making love to me, you naughty boy?

PARIS. Helena.

HELENA. You've spoken to me so little, and already you dare to do that.

PARIS [*impetuously*]. I am a lover of life. I skip the inessentials.

HELENA. Remember who I am.

PARIS. I have not forgotten, Daughter of Heaven. [*Suddenly he leaps to his feet.*] Listen!

HELENA. Shhh! That's the King and Analytikos in the library.

PARIS. No! No! Don't you hear the flutter of wings?

HELENA. Wings?

PARIS [*ecstatically*]. Venus, mother of Love!

HELENA [*alarmed*]. What is it?

PARIS. She has sent her messenger. I hear the patter of little feet.

HELENA. Those little feet are the soldiers below in the courtyard.

[*A trumpet sounds.*]

PARIS [*the truth of the situation breaking through his emotion*]. In a moment I shall be killed.

HELENA. Killed?

PARIS. Save me and save yourself!

HELENA. Myself?

PARIS. I shall rescue you and lead you on to life.

HELENA. No one has even spoken to me like that before.

PARIS. This is the first time your ears have heard the truth.

HELENA. Was it of you I've been dreaming?

PARIS. Your dream was but your unrealized desire.

HELENA. Menelaus has never made me feel like this. [*And then with a sudden shriek.*] Oh! I'm a wicked woman!

PARIS. No! No!

HELENA. For years I've been living with a man I didn't love.

PARIS. Yes! Yes!

HELENA. I'm lost!

PARIS [*at a loss*]. No! Yes! Yes! No!

HELENA. It was a profanation of the most holy.

PARIS. The holiest awaits you, Helena! Our love will lighten the Plutonian realms.

HELENA. Menelaus never spoke to me like that.

PARIS. 'Tis but the first whisper of my adoration.

HELENA. I can't face him every morning at breakfast for the rest of my life. That's even more than a Queen can bear.

PARIS. I am waiting to release you.

HELENA. I've stood it for seven years.

PARIS. I've been coming to you since the beginning of time.

HELENA. There is something urging me to go with you, something I do not understand.

PARIS. Quick! There is but a moment left us.

[*He takes her rapturously in his arms. There is a passionate embrace in the midst of which Tsumu enters.*]

TSUMU. The chiropodist has come.

HELENA. Bring me my outer garment and my purse.

[*Tsumu exits, her eyes wide on Paris.*]

PARIS. Helena! Helena!

[*Helena looks about her and takes up the papyrus that Menelaus has flung to the floor.*]

HELENA. A last word to the King. [*She looks at the papyrus.*] No, this won't do; I shall have to take this with me.

PARIS. What is it?

HELENA. Maskanda's discourse on the hip.

[*A trumpet sounds below in the courtyard.*]

PARIS [*excitedly*]. Leave it—or your hip may cost me my head. We haven't a minute to spare. Hurry! Hurry!

[*Helena takes up an eyebrow pencil and writes on the back of the papyrus. She looks for a place to put it and seeing the shield she smears it with some of the ointment and sticks the papyrus to it.*]

PARIS [*watching her in ecstasy*]. You are the fairest of all fair women and your name will blaze as a symbol throughout eternity.

[*Tsumu enters with the purse and the Queen's outer robe.*]

HELENA [*tossing the purse to Paris*]. Here, we may need this.

PARIS [*throwing it back to Tsumu*]. This for your silence, daughter of darkness. A prince has no need of purses.

TSUMU [*looking at him*]. A prince!

HELENA [*gloriously*]. My prince of poetry. My deliverer!

PARIS [*divinely*]. My queen of love!

[*They go out, Tsumu looking after them in speechless amazement. Suddenly she sees the papyrus on the shield, runs over and reads it and then rushes to the door of the library.*]

TSUMU [*calling*]. Analytikos.

[*She hides the purse in her bosom. Analytikos enters, scroll in hand.*]

ANALYTIKOS. Has the Queen summoned me?

TSUMU [*mysteriously*]. A terrible thing has happened.

ANALYTIKOS. What's the matter?

TSUMU. Where's the King?

ANALYTIKOS. In the library.

TSUMU. I have news more precious than the gold of Midas.

ANALYTIKOS [*giving her a purse*]. Well! What is it?

TSUMU [*speaking very dramatically and watching the effect of her words*]. The Queen has deserted Menelaus.

ANALYTIKOS [*receiving the shock philosophically*]. Swift are the ways of Nature. The Gods have smiled upon him.

TSUMU. The Gods have forsaken the King to smile upon a prince.

ANALYTIKOS. What?

TSUMU. He was a prince.

ANALYTIKOS [*apprehensively*]. Why do you say that?

TSUMU [*clutching her bosom*]. I have a good reason to know. [*There is a sound of voices below in the courtyard. Menelaus rushes in expectantly. Tsumu falls prostrate before him.*] Oh, King, in thy bottomless agony blame not a blameless negress. The Queen has fled!

MENELAUS [*in his delight forgetting himself and flinging her a purse*]. Is it true?

TSUMU. Woe! Woe is me!

MENELAUS [*storming*]. Out of my sight, you eyeless Argus!

ANALYTIKOS [*to Tsumu*]. Quick, send a messenger. Find out who he was.

[*Tsumu sticks the third purse in her bosom and runs out.*]

MENELAUS [*with radiant happiness, kneeling before the bust of Zeus*]. Ye Gods, I thank ye. Peace and a happy life at last.

[*The shouts in the courtyard grow louder.*]

ANALYTIKOS. The news has spread through the palace.

MENELAUS [*in trepidation, springing up*]. No one would dare stop the progress of the Queen.

TSUMU [*rushes in and prostrates herself before the King*]. Woe is me! They have gone by the road to the harbor.

MENELAUS [*anxiously*]. Yes! Yes!

TSUMU. By the King's orders no man has dared gaze upon Her Majesty. They all fell prostrate before her.

MENELAUS. Good! Good! [*Attempting to cover his delight.*] Go! Go! You garrulous dog.

[*Tsumu gets up and points to shield. Analytikos and the King look toward it. Analytikos tears off the papyrus and brings it to Menelaus. Tsumu, watching them, exits.*]

MENELAUS [*reading*]. "I am not a bad woman. I did what I had to do." How Greek to blame fate for what one wants to do.

[*Tsumu again comes tumbling in.*]

TSUMU [*again prostrate before the King*]. A rumor flies through the city. He — he —

ANALYTIKOS [*anxiously*]. Well? Well?

TSUMU. He — he —

MENELAUS [*furiously to Analytikos*]. Rid me of this croaking raven.

TSUMU. Evil has fallen on Sparta. He —

ANALYTIKOS. Yes — yes —

MENELAUS [*in a rage*]. Out of my sight, perfidious Nubian.

[*Sounds of confusion in the courtyard. Suddenly she springs to her feet and yells at the top of her voice.*]

TSUMU. He was Paris, Prince of Troy!

[*They all start back. Analytikos stumbles into a seat. Menelaus turns pale. Tsumu leers like a black Nemesis.*]

ANALYTIKOS [*very ominously*]. Who can read the secret of the Fates?

MENELAUS [*frightened*]. What do you mean?

ANALYTIKOS. He is the son of Priam, King of Troy.

TSUMU [*adding fuel*]. And of Hecuba, Queen of the Trojans.

[*She rushes out to spread the news.*]

ANALYTIKOS. That makes the matter international.

MENELAUS [*quickly*]. But we have treaties with Troy.

ANALYTIKOS. Circumstances alter treaties. They will mean nothing.

MENELAUS. Nothing?

ANALYTIKOS. No more than a scrap of papyrus. Sparta will fight to regain her Queen.

MENELAUS. But I don't want her back.

ANALYTIKOS. Can you tell that to Sparta? Remember, the King can do no wrong. Last night I dreamed of war.

MENELAUS. No! No! Don't say that. After the scandal I can't be expected to fight to get her back.

ANALYTIKOS. Sparta will see with the eyes of chivalry.

MENELAUS [*fuming*]. But I don't believe in war.

ANALYTIKOS [*still obdurate*]. Have you forgotten the oath pledged of old, with Ulysses and Agamemnon? They have sworn, if ever the time came, to fight and defend the Queen.

MENELAUS [*bitterly*]. I didn't think of the triple alliance.

ANALYTIKOS. Can Sparta ask less of her King?

MENELAUS. Let's hear the other side. We can perhaps arbitrate. Peace at any price.

ANALYTIKOS. Some bargains are too cheap.

MENELAUS [*hopelessly*]. But I am a pacifist.

ANALYTIKOS. You are Menelaus of Sparta, and Sparta's a nation of soldiers.

MENELAUS [*desperately*]. I am too proud to fight!

ANALYTIKOS. Here, put on your shield. [*A great clamor comes up from the courtyard. Analytikos steps out on the balcony and is greeted with shouts of "The King! The King!" Addressing the crowd.*] People of Sparta, this calamity has been forced upon us. [*Menelaus winces.*] We are a peaceful people. But thanks to our unparalleled efficiency, the military system of Sparta is the most powerful in all Greece and we can mobilize in half an hour.

[*Loud acclaims from the people. Menelaus, the papyrus still in hand, crawls over and attempts to stop Analytikos.*]

ANALYTIKOS [*not noticing him*]. In the midst of connubial and communal peace the thunderbolt has fallen on the King. [*Menelaus tugs at Analytikos' robe.*] Broken in spirit as he is, he is already pawing the ground like a battle steed. Never will we lay down our arms! We and Jupiter! [*Cheers.*] Never until the Queen is restored to Menelaus. Never, even if it takes ten years. [*Menelaus squirms. A loud cheer.*] Even now the King is buckling on his shield. [*More cheers. Analytikos steps farther forward and then with bursting eloquence.*] One hate we have and one alone! [*Yells from below.*]

Hate by water and hate by land,
Hate of the head and hate of the hand,
Hate of Paris and hate of Troy
That has broken the Queen for a moment's toy.

[*The yells grow fiercer.*]

Zeus' thunder will shatter the Trojan throne.
We have one hate and one alone!

[*Menelaus sits on the floor dejectedly looking at the papyrus. A thunder of voices from the people.*]

We have one hate and one alone. Troy! Troy!

[*Helmets and swords are thrown into the air. The cheers grow tumultuous, trumpets are blown, and the*

Curtain falls.]

THE SHADOWED STAR

By Mary MacMillan

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CAST

A Woman, *the mother.*
An Old Woman, *the grandmother.*
Two Girls, *the daughters.*
A Messenger Boy.
A Neighbor.
Another Neighbor.

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THE SHADOWED STAR

By Mary MacMillan

[*A very bare room in a tenement house, uncarpeted, the boards being much worn, and from the walls the bluish whitewash has scaled away; in the front on one side is a cooking-stove, and farther back on the same side a window; on the opposite side is a door opening into a hallway; in the middle of the room there is a round, worn dining-room table, on which stands a stunted, scraggly bit of an evergreen-tree; at the back of the room, near the window, stands an old-fashioned safe with perforated tin front; next it a door opening into an inner room, and next it in the corner a bed, on which lies a palid woman; another woman, very old, sits in a rocking-chair in front of the stove and rocks. There is silence for a long space, the old woman rocking and the woman on the bed giving an occasional low sigh or groan. At last the old woman speaks.*]

The Old Woman. David an' Michael might be kapin' the Christmas wid us tomorrow night if we hadn't left the ould counthry. They'd never be crossin' the sea — all the many weary miles o' wetness an' fog an' cold to be kapin' it wid us here in this great house o' brick walls in a place full o' strange souls. They would never be for crossin' all that weary, cold, green wather, groanin' an' tossin' like it was the grave o' sivin thousan' divils. Ah, but it would be a black night at sea! [*She remains silent for a few minutes, staring at the stove and rocking slowly.*] If they hadn't to cross that wet, cold sea they'd maybe come. But wouldn't they be afeard o' this great city, an' would they iver find us here? Six floors up, an' they niver off the ground in their lives. What would ye be thinkin'? [*The other woman does not answer her. She then speaks petulantly.*] What would ye be thinkin'? Mary, have ye gone clane to slape? [*Turns her chair and peers around the back of it at the pallid woman on the bed, who sighs and answers.*]

The Woman. No, I on'y wisht I could. Maybe they'll come — I don't know, but father an' Michael wasn't much for thravel. [*After a pause and very wearily.*] Maybe they'll not come, yet [*slowly*], maybe I'll be kapin' the Christmas wid them there. [*The Old Woman seems not to notice this, wandering from her question back to her memories.*]

The Old Woman. No, they'll niver be lavin' the ould land, the green land, the home land. I'm wishing I was there wid thim. [*Another pause, while she stares at the stove.*] Maybe we'd have a duck an' potatoes, an' maybe something to drink to kape us warm against the cold. An' the boys would all be dancin' an' the girls have rosy cheeks. [*There is another pause, and then a knock at the door. "Come in," the two women call, in reedy, weak voices, and a thin, slatternly Irish woman enters.*]

The Neighbor. God avnin' to ye; I came in to ask if I might borrow the loan o' a bit o' tay, not havin' a leaf of it left.

The Woman. We have a little left, just enough we was savin' for ourselves to-night, but you're welcome to it — maybe the girls will bring some. Will ye get it for her, mother? Or she can help herself — it's in the safe. It's on the lower shelf among the cups an' saucers an' plates. [*The Old Woman and Neighbor go to the safe and hunt for the tea, and do not find it readily. The safe has little in it but a few cracked and broken dishes.*]

THE NEIGHBOR [*holding up a tiny paper bag with an ounce perhaps of tea in it.*] It's just a scrap!

THE OLD WOMAN. To be sure! We use so much tay! We're that exthravagant!

THE NEIGHBOR. It hurts me to take it from ye — maybe I'd better not.

THE OLD WOMAN. The girls will bring more. We always have a cupboard full o' things. We're always able to lend to our neighbors.

THE NEIGHBOR. It's in great luck, ye are. For some of us be so poor we don't know where the next bite's comin' from. An' this winter whin iverything's so high an' wages not raised, a woman can't find enough to cook for her man's dinner. It isn't that ye don't see things — oh, they're in the markets an' the shops, an' it makes yer mouth wather as ye walk along the sthrates this day before the Christmas to see the turkeys an' the ducks ye'll niver ate, an' the little pigs an' the or'nges an' bananies an' cranberries an' the cakes an' nuts an'— it's worse, I'm thinkin', to see thim whin there's no money to buy than it was in the ould counthry, where there was nothing to buy wid the money ye didn't have.

THE WOMAN. It's all one to us poor folk whether there be things to buy or not. [*She speaks gaspingly, as one who is short of breath.*] I'm on'y thinkin' o' the clane air at home — if I could have a mornin' o' fresh sunshine — these fogs an' smoke choke me so. The girls would take me out to the counthry if they had time an' I'd get well. But they haven't time. [*She falls into a fit of coughing.*]

THE OLD WOMAN. But it's like to be bright on Christmas Day. It wouldn't iver be cloudy on Christmas Day, an' maybe even now the stars would be crapin' out an' the air all clear an' cold an' the moon a-shinin' an' iverything so sthill an' quiet an' bleamin' an' breathless [*her voice falls almost to a whisper*], awaitin' on the Blessed Virgin. [*She goes to the window, lifts the blind, and peers out, then throws up the sash and leans far out. After a moment she pulls the sash down again and the blind and turns to those in the room with the look of pathetic disappointment in little things, of the aged.*] No, there's not a sthar, not one little twinklin' sthar, an' how'll the shepherds find their way? Iverything's dull an' black an' the clouds are hangin' down heavy an' sthill. How'll the shepherds find their way without the sthar to guide thim? [*Then almost whimpering.*] An' David an' Michael will niver be crossin' that wet, black sea! An' the girls — how'll they find their way home? They'll be lost somewhere along by the hedges. Ohone, ohone!

THE NEIGHBOR. Now, grannie, what would ye be sayin'? There's niver a hedge anywhere but granite blocks an' electric light poles an' plenty o' light in the city for thim to see all their way home. [*Then to the woman.*] Ain't they late?

THE WOMAN. They're always late, an' they kape gettin' lather an' lather.

THE NEIGHBOR. Yis, av coorse, the sthores is all open in the avnin's before Christmas.

THE WOMAN. They go so early in the mornin' an' get home so late at night, an' they're so tired.

THE NEIGHBOR [*whiningly*]. They're lucky to be young enough to work an' not be married. I've got to go home to the childer an' give thim their tay. Pat's gone to the saloon again, an' tomorrow bein' Christmas I misdoubt he'll be terrible dhrunk again, an' me on'y jist well from the blow in the shoulder the last time. [*She wipes her eyes and moves towards the door.*]

THE OLD WOMAN. Sthay an' kape Christmas wid us. We're goin' to have our celebratin' to-night on Christmas Eve, the way folks do here. I like it best on Christmas Day, the way 'tis in the ould counthry, but here 'tis Christmas Eve they kape. We're waitin' for the girls to come home to start things — they knowin' how — Mary an' me on'y know how to kape Christmas Day as 'tis at home. But the girls'll soon be here, an' they'll have the three an' do the cookin' an' all, an' we'll kape up the jollity way into the night.

THE NEIGHBOR [*looks questioningly and surprised at the Woman, whose eyes are on the mother.*] Nay, if Pat came home dhrunk an' didn't find me, he'd kill me. We have all to be movin' on to our own throubles. [*She goes out, and the old woman leaves the Christmas-tree which she has been fingering and admir-*

ing, and sits down in the rocking-chair again. After a while she croons to herself in a high, broken voice. This lasts some time, when there is the noise of a slamming door and then of footsteps approaching.]

THE WOMAN. If I could on'y be in the counthry!

THE OLD WOMAN. Maybe that would be the girls! [*She starts tremblingly to her feet, but the steps come up to the door and go by.*] If David and Michael was to come now an' go by — there bein' no sthar to guide thim!

THE WOMAN. Nay, mother, 'twas the shepherds that was guided by the sthar an' to the bed o' the Blessed Babe.

THE OLD WOMAN. Aye, so 'twas. What be I thinkin' of? The little Blessed Babe! [*She smiles and sits staring at the stove again for a little.*] But they could not find Him to-night. 'Tis so dark an' no sthars shinin.' [*After another pause.*] An' what would shepherds do in a ghreat city? 'Twould be lost they'd be, quicker than in any bog. Think ye, Mary, that the boys would be hootin' thim an' the p'lice, maybe, would want to be aristin' thim for loitherin'. They'd niver find the Blessed Babe, an' they'd have to be movin' on. [*Another pause, and then there is the sound of approaching footsteps again. The Old Woman grasps the arms of her chair and leans forward, intently listening.*]—That would sure be the girls this time! [*But again the footsteps go by. The Old Woman sighs.*] Ah, but 'tis weary waitin'! [*There is another long pause.*] 'Twas on that day that David an' me was plighted — a brave Christmas Day wid a shinin' sun an' a sky o' blue wid fair, white clouds. An' David an' me met at the early mass in the dark o' the frosty mornin' afore the sun rose — an' there was all day good times an' a duck for dinner and puddin's an' a party at the O'Brady's in the evenin', whin David an' me danced. Ah, but he was a beautiful dancer, an' me, too — I was as light on my feet as a fairy. [*She begins to croon an old dance tune and hobbles to her feet, and, keeping time with her head, tries a grotesque and feeble sort of dancing. Her eyes brighten and she smiles proudly.*] Aye, but I danced like a fairy, an' there was not another couple so sprightly an' handsome in all the country. [*She tires, and, looking pitiful and disappointed, hobbles back to her chair, and drops into it again.*] Ah, but I be old now, and the strength fails me. [*She falls into silence for a few minutes.*] 'Twas the day before the the little man, the little white dove, my next Christmas that Michael was born — little son! [*There is a moment's pause, and then the pallid woman on the bed has a violent fit of coughing.*]

THE WOMAN. Mother, could ye get me a cup o' wather? If the girls was here to get me a bite to ate, maybe it would kape the breath in me the night.

THE OLD WOMAN [*starts and stares at her daughter, as if she hardly comprehended the present reality. She gets up and goes over to the window under which there is a pail full of water. She dips some out in a tin cup and carries it to her bed.*] Ye should thry to get up an' move about some, so ye can enjoy the Christmas threat. 'Tis bad bein' sick on Christmas. Thry, now, Mary, to sit up a bit. The girls'll be wantin' ye to be merry wid the rest av us.

THE WOMAN [*looking at her mother with a sad wistfulness*]. I wouldn't spoil things for the girls if I could help. Maybe, mother, if ye'd lift me a little I could sit up. [*The Old Woman tugs at her, and she herself tries hard to get into a sitting posture, but after some effort and panting for breath, she falls back again. After a pause for rest, she speaks gaspingly.*] Maybe I'll feel sthronger lather whin the girls come home — they could help me — [*with the plaint of longing in her voice*] they be so late! [*After another pause.*] Maybe I'll be sthrong again in the mornin' — if I'd had a cup of coffee.— Maybe I could get up — an' walk about — an' do the cookin'. [*There is a knock at the door, and again they call, "Come in," in reedy, weak voices. There enters a little messenger boy in a ragged overcoat that reaches almost to his heels. His eyes are large and bright, his face pale and dirty, and he is fearfully tired and worn.*]

THE WOMAN. Why, Tim, boy, come in. Sit ye down an' rest, ye're lookin' weary.

THE OLD WOMAN. Come to the stove,

Timmie, man, an' warm yourself. We always kape a warm room an' a bright fire for visitors.

THE BOY. I was awful cold an' hungry an' I come home to get somethin' to eat before. I started out on another trip, but my sisters ain't home from the store yit, an' the fire's gone out in the stove, an' the room's cold as outside. I thought maybe ye'd let me come in here an' git warm.

THE OLD WOMAN. Poor orphan! Poor lamb! To be shure ye shall get warm by our sthove.

THE BOY. The cars are so beastly col' an' so crowded a feller mostly has to stand on the back platform. [*The Old Woman takes him by the shoulder and pushes him toward the stove, but he resists.*]

THE BOY. No, thank ye — I don't want to go so near yet; my feet's all numb an' they allays hurt so when they warms up fast.

THE OLD WOMAN. Thin sit ye down off from the sthove. [*Moves the rocking-chair farther away from the stove for him.*]

THE BOY. If ye don't mind I'd rather stand on 'em 'til they gets a little used to it. They been numb off an' on mos' all day.

THE WOMAN. Soon as yer sisters come, Timmie, ye'd betther go to bed — 'tis the best place to get warm.

THE BOY. I can't — I got most a three-hour trip yet. I won't get home any 'fore midnight if I don't get lost, and maybe I'll get lost — I did once out there. I've got to take a box o' 'Merican Beauty roses to a place eight mile out, an' the house ain't on the car track, but nearly a mile off, the boss said. I wisht they could wait till mornin', but the orders was they just got to get the roses to-night. You see, out there they don' have no gas goin' nights when there's a moon, an' there'd ought to be a moon to-night, on'y the clouds is so thick there ain't no light gets through.

THE OLD WOMAN. There's no sthar shinin' to-night, Tim. [*She shakes her head ominously. She goes to the window for the second time, opens it as before, and looks out. Shutting the window, she comes back and speaks slowly and sadly.*] Niver a sthar. An' the shepherds will be havin' a hard time, Tim, like you, findin' their way.

THE BOY. Shepherds? In town? What shepherds?

THE WOMAN. She means the shepherds on Christmas Eve that wint to find the Blessed Babe, Jesus.

THE OLD WOMAN. 'Tis Christmas Eve, Timmie; ye haven't forgot that, have ye?

THE BOY. You bet I ain't. I know pretty well when Christmas is comin', by the way I got to hustle, an' the size of the boxes I got to carry. Seems as if my legs an' me would like to break up pardnership. I got to work till midnight every night, an' I'm so sleepy I drop off in the cars whenever I get a seat. An' the girls is at the store so early an' late they don't get time to cook me nothin' to eat.

THE WOMAN. Be ye hungry, Timmie?

THE BOY [*diffidently and looking at the floor*]. No, I ain't hungry now.

THE WOMAN. Be ye shure, Timmie?

THE BOY. Oh, I kin go till I git home.

THE WOMAN. Mother, can't you find something for him to eat?

THE OLD WOMAN. To be shure, to be shure. [*Bustling about.*] We always kapes a full cupboard to thrate our neighbors wid whin they comes in. [*She goes to the empty safe and fusses in it to find something. She pretends to be very busy, and then glances around at the boy with a sly look and a smile.*] Ah, Timmie, lad, what would ye like to be havin', now? If you had the wish o' yer heart for yer Christmas dinner an' a good fairy to set it all afore ye? Ye'd be wishin' maybe, for a fine roast duck, to begin wid, in its own gravies an' some apple sauce to go wid it; an' ye'd be thinkin' o' a little bit o' pig nicely browned an' a plate of potaties; an' the little fairy woman would be bringin' yer puddin's an' nuts an' apples an' a dish o' the swatest tay. [*The Boy smiles rather ruefully.*]

THE WOMAN. But, mother, you're not gettin' Tim something to ate.

THE BOY. She's makin' me mouth water all right. [*The Old Woman goes back to her search, but again turns about with a cunning look, and says to the boy:*]

THE OLD WOMAN. Maybe ye'll meet

that little fairy woman out there in the counthry road where ye're takin' the roses! [*Nods her head knowingly, turning to the safe again.*] Here's salt an here's pepper an' here's mustard an' a crock full o' sugar, an', oh! Tim, here's some fine cold bacon — fine, fat, cold bacon — an' here's half a loaf o' white wheat bread! Why, Timmie, lad, that's just the food to make boys fat! Ye'll grow famously on it. 'Tis a supper, whin ye add to it a dhrop o' iligant milk, that's fit for a king. [*She bustles about with great show of being busy and having much to prepare. Puts the plate of cold bacon upon the table where stands the stunted bit of an evergreen-tree, then brings the half-loaf of bread and cuts it into slices, laying pieces of bacon on the slices of bread. Then she pours out a glass of milk from a dilapidated and broken pitcher in the safe and brings it to the table, the Boy all the while watching her hungrily. At last he says rather apologetically to the woman.*]

THE BOY. I ain't had nothin' since a wienerwurst at eleven o'clock.

THE OLD WOMAN. Now, dhraw up, Timmie, boy, an' ate yer fill; ye're more thin welcome. [*The boy does not sit down, but stands by the table and eats a slice of bread and bacon, drinking from the glass of milk occasionally.*]

THE WOMAN. Don't they niver give ye nothin' to ate at the gran' houses when ye'd be takin' the roses?

THE BOY. Not them. They'd as soon think o' feedin' a telephone or an automobile as me.

THE WOMAN. But don't they ask ye in to get warm whin ye've maybe come so far?

THE BOY. No, they don't seem to look at me 'zacly like a caller. They generally steps out long enough to sign the receipt-book an' shut the front door behin' 'em so as not to let the house get col' the length o' time I'm standin' there. Well, I'm awful much obleeged to ye. Now, I got to be movin' on.

THE OLD WOMAN. Sthop an' cilibrate the Christmas wid us. We ain't started to do nothin' yet because the girls haven't come — they know how [*nodding her head*] — an' they're goin' to bring things — all kinds o' good things to ate an' a branch of rowan berries — ah, boy, a great branch o' rowan wid scarlet berries shinin' [*gesticulating and with gleaming eyes*], an' we'll all be merry an' kape it up late into the night.

THE BOY [*in a little fear of her*]. I guess it's pretty late now. I got to make that trip an' I guess when I get home I'll be so sleepy I'll jus' tumble in. Ye've been awful good to me, an' it's the first time I been warm to-day. Good-by. [*He starts toward the door, but the Old Woman follows him and speaks to him coaxingly.*]

THE OLD WOMAN. Ah, don't ye go, Michael, lad! Now, bide wid us a bit. [*The Boy, surprised at the name, looks queerly at the Old Woman, who then stretches out her arms to him, and says beseechingly:*] Ah, boy, ah, Mike, bide wid us, now ye've come! We've been that lonesome widout ye!

THE BOY [*frightened and shaking his head*]. I've got to be movin'.

THE OLD WOMAN. No, Michael, little lamb, no!

THE BOY [*almost terrified, watching her with staring eyes, and backing out*]. I got to go! [*The Boy goes out, and the Old Woman breaks into weeping, totters over to her old rocking-chair and drops into it, rocks to and fro, wailing to herself.*]

THE OLD WOMAN. Oh, to have him come an' go again, my little Michael, my own little lad!

THE WOMAN. Don't ye, dearie; now, then, don't ye! 'Twas not Michael, but just our little neighbor boy, Tim. Ye know, poor lamb, now if ye'll thry to remember, that father an' Michael is gone to the betther land an' us is left.

THE OLD WOMAN. Nay, nay, 'tis the fairies that took thim an' have thim now, kapin' thim an' will not ever give thim back.

THE WOMAN. Whisht, mother! Spake not of the little folk on the Holy Night! [*Crosses herself.*] Have ye forgot the time o' all the year it is? Now, dhry yer eyes, dearie, an' thry to be cheerful like 'fore the girls be comin' home. [*A noise is heard, the banging of a door and footsteps.*] Thim be the girls now, shure they be comin' at last. [*But the sound of footsteps dies away.*] But they'll be comin' soon. [*Wearily, but with the inveterate hope.*]

[*The two women relapse into silence again, which is undisturbed for a few minutes. Then there is a knock at the door, and together in quavering, reedy voices, they call, "Come in," as before. There enters a tall, big, broad-shouldered woman with a cold, discontented, hard look upon the face that might have been handsome some years back; still, in her eyes, as she looks at the pallid woman on the bed, there is something that denotes a softness underneath it all.*]

THE OLD WOMAN. Good avnin' to ye! We're that pleased to see our neighbors!

THE NEIGHBOR [*without paying any attention to the Old Woman, but entirely addressing the woman on the bed.*] How's yer cough?

THE WOMAN. Oh, it's jist the same — maybe a little betther. If I could on'y get to the counthry! But the girls must be workin' — they haven't time to take me. Sit down, won't ye? [*The Neighbor goes to the bed and sits down on the foot of it.*]

THE NEIGHBOR. I'm most dead, I'm so tired. I did two washin's to-day — went out and did one this mornin' and then my own after I come home this afternoon. I jus' got through sprinklin' it an' I'll iron to-morrow.

THE WOMAN. Not on Christmas Day!

THE NEIGHBOR [*with a sneer*]. Christmas Day! Did ye hear 'bout the Beckers? Well, they was all put out on the sidewalk this afternoon. Becker's been sick, ye know, an' ain't paid his rent an' his wife's got a two weeks' old baby. It sort o' stunned Mis' Becker, an' she sat on one of the mattresses out there an' wouldn't move, an' nobody couldn't do nothin' with her. But they ain't the only ones has bad luck — Smith, the painter, fell off a ladder an' got killed. They took him to the hospital, but it wasn't no use — his head was all mashed in. His wife's got them five boys an' Smith never saved a cent, though he warn't a drinkin' man. It's a good thing Smith's children is boys — they can make their livin' easier!

THE WOMAN [*smiling faintly*]. Ain't ye got no cheerful news to tell? It's Christmas Eve, ye know.

THE NEIGHBOR. Christmas Eve don't seem to prevent people from dyin' an' bein' turned out o' house an' home. Did ye hear how bad the dipthery is? They say as how if it gits much worse they'll have to close the school in our ward. Two o' the Homan children's dead with it. The first one wasn't sick but two days, an' they say his face all turned black 'fore he died. But it's a good thing they're gone, for the Homans ain't got enough to feed the other six. Did ye hear 'bout Jim Kelly drinkin' again? Swore off for two months, an' then took to it harder'n ever — perty near killed the baby one night.

THE WOMAN [*with a wan, beseeching smile*]. Won't you please not tell me any more? It just breaks me heart.

THE NEIGHBOR [*grimly*]. I ain't got no other kind o' news to tell. I s'pose I might's well go home.

THE WOMAN. No, don't ye go. I like to have ye here when ye're kinder.

THE NEIGHBOR [*fingering the bed clothes and smoothing them over the woman*]. Well, it's gettin' late, an' I guess ye ought to go to sleep.

THE WOMAN. Oh, no, I won't go to slape till the girls come. They'll bring me somethin' to give me strength. If they'd on'y come soon.

THE NEIGHBOR. Ye ain't goin' to set up 'til they git home?

THE OLD WOMAN. That we are. We're kapin' the cilebratin' till they come.

THE NEIGHBOR. What celebratin'?

THE OLD WOMAN. Why, the Christmas, to be shure. We're goin' to have high jinks to-night. In the ould counthry 'tis always Christmas Day, but here 'tis begun on Christmas Eve, an' we're on'y waitin' for the girls, because they know how to fix things betther nor Mary an' me.

THE NEIGHBOR [*staring*]. But ain't they workin' in the store?

THE OLD WOMAN. Yes, but they're comin' home early to-night.

THE NEIGHBOR [*laughing ironically*]. Don't ye fool yerselves. Why, they've got to work harder to-night than any in the whole year.

THE WOMAN [*wistfully*]. But they did say they'd thry to come home early.

THE NEIGHBOR. The store's all

crowded to-night. Folks 'at's got money to spend never remembers it till the last minute. If they didn't have none they'd be thinkin' 'bout it long ahead. Well, I got to be movin'. I wouldn't stay awake, if I was you.

THE OLD WOMAN. Sthay and kape the Christmas wid us! We'll be havin' high jinks by an' by. Sthay, now, an' help us wid our jollity!

THE NEIGHBOR. Nay, I left my children in bed, an' I got to go back to 'em. An' I got to get some rest myself — I got that ironin' ahead o' me in the mornin'. You folks better get yer own rest. [*She rises and walks to the door.*]

THE OLD WOMAN [*beamingly*]. David an' Michael's comin'. [*The Neighbor stands with her back against the door and her hand on the knob, staring at the Old Woman.*]

THE OLD WOMAN [*smiling rapturously*]. Yis, we're goin' to have a gran' time. [*The Neighbor looks puzzled and fearful and troubled, first at the Woman and then at the Old Woman. Finally, without a word, she opens the door and goes out.*]

THE OLD WOMAN [*going about in a tottering sort of dance*]. David an' Michael's comin' an' the shepherds for the fairies will show thim the way.

THE WOMAN. If the girls would on'y come! If they'd give me somethin' so as I wouldn't be so tired!

THE OLD WOMAN. There's niver a sthar an' there's nobody to give thim a kind word an' the counthry roads are dark an' foul, but they've got the little folk to guide thim! An' whin they reach the city — the poor, lonesome shepherds from the hills! — they'll find naught but coldness an' hardness an' hurry. [*Questioningly.*] Will the fairies show thim the way? Fairies' eyes be used to darkness, but can they see where it is black night in one corner an' a blaze o' light in another? [*She goes to the window for the third time, opens it and leans far out for a long time, then turns about and goes on in her monotone, closing the window.—She seems by this time quite to have forgotten the presence of the pallid woman on the bed, who has closed her eyes, and lies like one dead.*]

THE OLD WOMAN. Nay, there's niver a sthar, an' the clouds are hangin' heavier an' lower an' the flakes o' snow are fallin'. Poor little folk guidin' thim poor lost shepherds, leadin' thim by the hand so gently because there's no others to be kind to thim, an' bringin' thim to the manger o' the Blessed Babe. [*She comes over to her rocking-chair and again sits down in it, rocks slowly to and fro, nodding her head in time to the motion.*] Poor little mite of a babe, so cold an' unwelcome an' forgotten save by the silly ould shepherds from the hills! The silly ould shepherds from the strength o' the hills, who are comin' through the darkness in the lead o' the little folk! [*She speaks slower and lower, and finally drops into a quiet crooning — it stops and the Old Woman has fallen asleep.*]

[*Curtain.*]

[*While the curtain is down the pallid, sick woman upon the bed dies, the Old Woman being asleep does not notice the slight struggle with death. The fire has gone out in the stove, and the light in the lamp, and the stage is in complete darkness when the two girls come stumbling in. They are too tired to speak, too weary to show surprise that the occupants of the room are not awake. They fumble about, trying to find matches in the darkness, and finally discover them and a candle in the safe. They light the candle and place it upon the table by the scraggy little evergreen-tree. They turn about and discern their grandmother asleep in the rocking-chair. Hurriedly they turn to the bed and discover their mother lying there dead. For a full minute they stand gazing at her, the surprise, wonder, awe, misery increasing in their faces; then with screams they run to the bed, throw themselves on their knees and bury their faces, sobbing, in the bedclothes at the Woman's feet.*]

[*Curtain.*]

ILE

A Play

By Eugene G. O'Neill

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CHARACTERS

BEN [*the cabin boy*].
THE STEWARD.
CAPTAIN KEENEY.
SLOCUM [*second mate*].
MRS. KEENEY.
JOE [*a harpooner*].
Members of the crew of the Atlantic Queen.

ILE was first produced by the Provincetown Players, New York City, on the night of November 30th, 1917, with the following cast:

BEN [*the cabin boy*]	*Harold Conley.*
THE STEWARD	*Robert Edwards.*
CAPTAIN KEENEY	*H. Collins.*
MR. SLOCUM [*second mate*]	*Ira Remsen.*
MRS. KEENEY	*Clara Savage.*
JOE [*the harpooner*]	*Lewis B. Ell.*

Produced under the direction of MISS NINA MOISE. Scenery by MR. LEWIS B. ELL.

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ILE

A Play

By Eugene G. O'Neill

[Scene: *Captain Keeney's cabin on board the steam whaling ship Atlantic Queen — a small, square compartment about eight feet high with a skylight in the center looking out on the poop deck. On the left (the stern of the ship) a long bench with rough cushions is built in against the wall. In front of the bench a table. Over the bench, several curtained port-holes.*

In the rear left, a door leading to the captain's sleeping quarters. To the right of the door a small organ, looking as if it were brand new, is placed against the wall.

On the right, to the rear, a marble-topped sideboard. On the sideboard, a woman's sewing basket. Farther forward, a doorway leading to the companionway, and past the officers' quarters to the main deck.

In the center of the room, a stove. From the middle of the ceiling a hanging lamp is suspended. The walls of the cabin are painted white.

There is no rolling of the ship, and the light which comes through the sky-light is sickly and faint, indicating one of those gray days of calm when ocean and sky are alike dead. The silence is unbroken except for the measured tread of some one walking up and down on the poop deck overhead.

It is nearing two bells — one o'clock — in the afternoon of a day in the year 1895.

* * *

At the rise of the curtain there is a moment of intense silence. Then The Steward enters and commences to clear the table of the few dishes which still remain on it after the Captain's dinner. He is an old, grizzled man dressed in dungaree pants, a sweater, and a woolen cap with ear flaps. His manner is sullen and angry. He stops stacking up the plates and casts a quick glance upward at the skylight; then tiptoes over to the closed door in rear and listens with his ear pressed to the crack. What he hears makes his face darken and he mutters a furious curse. There is a noise from the doorway on the right and he darts back to the table.

Ben enters. He is an over-grown gawky boy with a long, pinched face. He is dressed in sweater, fur cap, etc. His teeth are chattering with the cold and he hurries to the stove where he stands for a moment shivering, blowing on his hands, slapping them against his sides, on the verge of crying.]

The Steward [*in relieved tones — seeing who it is*]. Oh, 'tis you, is it? What-'re ye shiverin' 'bout? Stay by the stove where ye belong and ye'll find no need of chatterin'.

Ben. It's c-c-cold. [*Trying to control his chattering teeth — derisively.*] Who d'ye think it were — the Old Man?

The Steward [*makes a threatening move — Ben shrinks away*]. None o' your lip, young un, or I'll learn ye. [*More kindly.*] Where was it ye've been all o' the time — the fo'c's'tle?

Ben. Yes.

The Steward. Let the Old Man see ye up for'ard monkeyshinin' with the hands and ye'll get a hidin' ye'll not forget in a hurry.

Ben. Aw, he don't see nothin'. [*A trace of awe in his tones — he glances upward.*] He jest walks up and down like he didn't notice nobody — and stares at the ice to the no'the'ard.

The Steward [*the same tone of awe creeping into his voice*]. He's always

starin' at the ice. [*In a sudden rage, shaking his fist at the skylight.*] Ice, ice, ice! Damn him and damn the ice! Holdin' us in for nigh on a year — nothin' to see but ice — stuck in it like a fly in molasses!

BEN [*apprehensively*]. Ssshh! He'll hear ye.

THE STEWARD [*raging*]. Aye, damn, and damn the Arctic seas, and damn this rotten whalin' ship of his, and damn me for a fool to ever ship on it! [*Subsiding as if realizing the uselessness of this outburst — shaking his head — slowly, with deep conviction.*] He's a hard man — as hard a man as ever sailed the seas.

BEN [*solemnly*]. Aye.

THE STEWARD. The two years we all signed up for are done this day! Two years o' this dog's life, and no luck in the fishin', and the hands half starved with the food runnin' low, rotten as it is; and not a sign of him turnin' back for home! [*Bitterly.*] Home! I begin to doubt if ever I'll set foot on land again. [*Excitedly.*] What is it he thinks he's goin' to do? Keep us all up here after our time is worked out till the last man of us is starved to death or frozen? We've grub enough hardly to last out the voyage back if we started now. What are the men goin' to do 'bout it? Did ye hear any talk in the fo'c's'tle?

BEN [*going over to him — in a half whisper*]. They said if he don't put back south for home to-day they're goin' to mutiny.

THE STEWARD [*with grim satisfaction*]. Mutiny? Aye, 'tis the only thing they can do; and serve him right after the manner he's treated them — 's if they weren't no better nor dogs.

BEN. The ice is all broke up to s'uth'ard. They's clear water s'far 's you can see. He ain't got no excuse for not turnin' back for home, the men says.

THE STEWARD [*bitterly*]. He won't look nowheres but no'the'ard where they's only the ice to see. He don't want to see no clear water. All he thinks on is gettin' the ile — 's if it was our fault he ain't had good luck with the whales. [*Shaking his head.*] I think the man's mighty nigh losin' his senses.

BEN [*awed*]. D'you really think he's crazy?

THE STEWARD. Aye, it's the punishment o' God on him. Did ye ever hear of a man who wasn't crazy do the things he does? [*Pointing to the door in rear.*] Who but a man that's mad would take his woman — and as sweet a woman as ever was — on a rotten whalin' ship to the Arctic seas to be locked in by the ice for nigh on a year, and maybe lose her senses forever — for it's sure she'll never be the same again.

BEN [*sadly*]. She useter be awful nice to me before — [*His eyes grow wide and frightened.*] she got — like she is.

THE STEWARD. Aye, she was good to all of us. 'Twould have been hell on board without her; for he's a hard man — a hard, hard man — a driver if there ever was one. [*With a grim laugh.*] I hope he's satisfied now — drivin' her on till she's near lost her mind. And who could blame her? 'Tis a God's wonder we're not a ship full of crazed people — with the ice all the time, and the quiet so thick you're afraid to hear your own voice.

BEN [*with a frightened glance toward the door on right*]. She don't never speak to me no more — jest looks at me 's if she didn't know me.

THE STEWARD. She don't know no one — but him. She talks to him — when she does talk — right enough.

BEN. She does nothin' all day long now but sit and sew — and then she cries to herself without makin' no noise. I've seen her.

THE STEWARD. Aye, I could hear her through the door a while back.

BEN [*tiptoes over to the door and listens*]. She's cryin' now.

THE STEWARD [*furiously — shaking his fist*]. God send his soul to hell for the devil he is!

[*There is the noise of some one coming slowly down the companion-way stairs. The Steward hurries to his stacked-up dishes. He is so nervous from fright that he knocks off the top one which falls and breaks on the floor. He stands aghast, trembling with dread. Ben is violently rubbing off the organ with a piece of cloth which he has snatched from his pocket. Captain Keeney appears in the doorway on right and comes into the*

cabin, removing his fur cap as he does so. He is a man of about forty, around five-ten in height but looking much shorter on account of the enormous proportions of his shoulders and chest. His face is massive and deeply lined, with gray-blue eyes of a bleak hardness, and a tightly-clenched, thin-lipped mouth. His thick hair is long and gray. He is dressed in a heavy blue jacket and blue pants stuffed into his sea-boots. He is followed into the cabin by the Second Mate, a rangy six-footer with a lean weather-beaten face. The Mate is dressed about the same as the captain. He is a man of thirty or so.]

KEENEY [*comes toward The Steward with a stern look on his face. The Steward is visibly frightened and the stack of dishes rattles in his trembling hands. Keeney draws back his fist and The Steward shrinks away. The fist is gradually lowered and Keeney speaks slowly*]. 'Twould be like hitting a worm. It is nigh on two bells, Mr. Steward, and this truck not cleared yet.

THE STEWARD [*stammering*]. Y-y-yes, sir.

KEENEY. Instead of doin' your rightful work ye've been below here gossipin' old women's talk with that boy. [*To Ben, fiercely.*] Get out o' this you! Clean up the chart room. [*Ben darts past the Mate to the open doorway.*] Pick up that dish, Mr. Steward!

THE STEWARD [*doing so with difficulty*]. Yes, sir.

KEENEY. The next dish you break, Mr. Steward, you take a bath in the Behring Sea at the end of a rope.

THE STEWARD [*trembling*]. Yes, sir.

[*He hurries out. The Second Mate walks slowly over to the Captain.*]

MATE. I warn't 'specially anxious the man at the wheel should catch what I wanted to say to you, sir. That's why I asked you to come below.

KEENEY [*impatiently*]. Speak your say, Mr. Slocum.

MATE [*unconsciously lowering his voice*]. I'm afeared there'll be trouble with the hands by the look o' things. They'll likely turn ugly, every blessed one o' them, if you don't put back. The two years they signed up for is up today.

KEENEY. And d'you think you're tellin' me something new, Mr. Slocum? I've felt it in the air this long time past. D'you think I've not seen their ugly looks and the grudgin' way they worked?

[*The door in rear is opened and Mrs. Keeney stands in the doorway. She is a slight, sweet-faced little woman, primly dressed in black. Her eyes are red from weeping and her face drawn and pale. She takes in the cabin with a frightened glance and stands as if fixed to the spot by some nameless dread, clasping and unclasping her hands nervously. The two men turn and look at her.*]

KEENEY [*with rough tenderness*]. Well, Annie?

MRS. KEENEY [*as if awakening from a dream*]. David, I —

[*She is silent. The Mate starts for the doorway.*]

KEENEY [*turning to him — sharply*]. Wait!

MATE. Yes, sir.

KEENEY. D'you want anything, Annie?

MRS. KEENEY [*after a pause during which she seems to be endeavoring to collect her thoughts*]. I thought maybe — I'd go up on deck, David, to get a breath of fresh air.

[*She stands humbly awaiting his permission. He and The Mate exchange a significant glance.*]

KEENEY. It's too cold, Annie. You'd best stay below. There's nothing to look at on deck — but ice.

MRS. KEENEY [*monotonously*]. I know —ice, ice, ice! But there's nothing to see down here but these walls.

[*She makes a gesture of loathing.*]

KEENEY. You can play the organ, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY [*dully*]. I hate the organ. It puts me in mind of home.

KEENEY [*a touch of resentment in his voice*]. I got it jest for you!

MRS. KEENEY [*dully*]. I know. [*She turns away from them and walks slowly to the bench on left. She lifts up one of the curtains and looks through a porthole; then utters an exclamation of joy.*]

Ah, water! Clear water! As far as I can see! How good it looks after all these months of ice! [*She turns round to them, her face transfigured with joy.*] Ah, now I must go up on deck and look at it, David!

KEENEY [*frowning*]. Best not to-day, Annie. Best wait for a day when the sun shines.

MRS. KEENEY [*desperately*]. But the sun never shines in this terrible place.

KEENEY [*a tone of command in his voice*]. Best not to-day, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY [*crumbling before this command — abjectly*]. Very well, David.

[*She stands there, staring straight before her as if in a daze.—The two men look at her uneasily.*]

KEENEY [*sharply*]. Annie!

MRS. KEENEY [*dully*]. Yes, David.

KEENEY. Me and Mr. Slocum has business to talk about — ship's business.

MRS. KEENEY. Very well, David.

[*She goes slowly out, rear, and leaves the door three-quarters shut behind her.*]

KEENEY. Best not have her on deck if they's goin' to be any trouble.

MATE. Yes, sir.

KEENEY. And trouble they's going to be. I feel it in my bones. [*Takes a revolver from the pocket of his coat and examines it.*] Got your'n?

MATE. Yes, sir.

KEENEY. Not that we'll have to use 'em — not if I know their breed of dog — jest to frighten 'em up a bit. [*Grimly.*] I ain't never been forced to use one yit; and trouble I've had by land and by sea s'long as I kin remember, and will have till my dyin' day, I reckon.

MATE [*hesitatingly*]. Then you ain't goin' — to turn back?

KEENEY. Turn back! Mr. Slocum, did you ever hear o' me pointin' s'uth for home with only a measly four hundred barrel of ile in the hold?

MATE [*hastily*]. But the grub's gittin' low.

KEENEY. They's enough to last a long time yit, if they're careful with it; and they's plenty of water.

MATE. They say it's not fit to eat — what's left; and the two years they signed on fur is up to-day. They might make trouble for you in the courts when we git home.

KEENEY. Let them make what law trouble they kin! I don't give a damn 'bout the money. I've got to git the ile! [*Glancing sharply at the Mate.*] You ain't turnin' no sea lawyer, be you, Mr. Slocum?

MATE [*flushing*]. Not by a hell of a sight, sir.

KEENEY. What do the fools want to go home fur now? Their share o' the four hundred barrel wouldn't keep them in chewin' terbacco.

MATE [*slowly*]. They wants to git back to their old folks an' things, I s'pose.

KEENEY [*looking at him searchingly*]. 'N you want to turn back too. [*The Mate looks down confusedly before his sharp gaze.*] Don't lie, Mr. Slocum. It's writ down plain in your eyes. [*With grim sarcasm.*] I hope, Mr. Slocum, you ain't agoin' to jine the men agin me.

MATE [*indignantly*]. That ain't fair, sir, to say sich things.

KEENEY [*with satisfaction*]. I warn't much afeard o' that, Tom. You been with me nigh on ten year and I've learned ye whalin'. No man kin say I ain't a good master, if I be a hard one.

MATE. I warn't thinkin' of myself, sir —'bout turnin' home, I mean. [*Desperately.*] But Mrs. Keeney, sir — seems like she ain't jest satisfied up here, ailin' like — what with the cold an' bad luck an' the ice an' all.

KEENEY [*his face clouding — rebukingly, but not severely*]. That's my business, Mr. Slocum. I'll thank you to steer a clear course o' that. [*A pause.*] The ice'll break up soon to no'the'ard. I could see it startin' to-day. And when it goes and we git some sun Annie'll pick up. [*Another pause — then he bursts forth.*] It ain't the damned money what's keepin' me up in the Northern seas, Tom. But I can't go back to Homeport with a measly four hundred barrel of ile. I'd die fust. I ain't never come back home in all my days without a full ship. Ain't that true?

MATE. Yes, sir; but this voyage you been ice-bound, an' —

KEENEY [*scornfully*]. And d'you s'pose any of 'em would believe that — any o' them skippers I've beaten voyage after voyage? Can't you hear 'em laughin' and sneerin' — Tibbots n' Harris n' Simms and the rest — and all o' Home-

port makin' fun o' me? "Dave Keeney, what boasts he's the best whalin' skipper out o' Homeport, comin' back with a measly four hundred barrel of ile!" [*The thought of this drives him into a frenzy and he smashes his fist down on the marble top of the sideboard.*] I got to git the ile, I tell you! How could I figger on this ice? It's never been so bad before in the thirty year I been acomin' here. And now it's breakin' up. In a couple o' days it'll be all gone. And they's whale here, plenty of 'em. I know they is and I ain't never gone wrong yit. I got to git the ile! I got to git it in spite of all hell, and by God, I ain't agoin' home till I do git it!

[*There is the sound of subdued sobbing from the door in rear. The two men stand silent for a moment, listening. Then Keeney goes over to the door and looks in. He hesitates for a moment as if he were going to enter — then closes the door softly. Joe, the harpooner, an enormous six-footer with a battered, ugly face, enters from right and stands waiting for the Captain to notice him.*]

KEENEY [*turning and seeing him*]. Don't be standin' there like a hawk, Harpooner. Speak up!

JOE [*confusedly*]. We want — the men, sir — they wants to send a depitation aft to have a word with you.

KEENEY [*furiously*]. Tell 'em to go to — [*Checks himself and continues grimly.*] Tell 'em to come. I'll see 'em.

JOE. Aye, aye, sir.

[*He goes out.*]

KEENEY [*with a grim smile*]. Here it comes, the trouble you spoke of, Mr. Slocum, and we'll make short shift of it. It's better to crush such things at the start than let them make headway.

MATE [*worriedly*]. Shall I wake up the First and Fourth, sir? We might need their help.

KEENEY. No, let them sleep. I'm well able to handle this alone, Mr. Slocum.

[*There is the shuffling of footsteps from outside and five of the crew crowd into the cabin, led by Joe. All are dressed alike — sweaters, sea boots, etc. They glance uneasily at the Captain, twirling their fur caps in their hands.*]

KEENEY [*after a pause*]. Well? Who's to speak fur ye?

JOE [*stepping forward with an air of bravado*]. I be.

KEENEY [*eyeing him up and down coldly*]. So you be. Then speak your say and be quick about it.

JOE [*trying not to wilt before the Captain's glance and avoiding his eyes*]. The time we signed up for is done to-day.

KEENEY [*icily*]. You're tellin' me nothin' I don't know.

JOE. You ain't p'intin' fur home yit, far s'we kin see.

KEENEY. No, and I ain't agoin' to till this ship is full of ile.

JOE. You can't go no further no'the with the ice before ye.

KEENEY. The ice is breaking up.

JOE [*after a slight pause, during which the others mumble angrily to one another*]. The grub we're gittin' now is rotten.

KEENEY. It's good enough fur ye. Better men than ye are have eaten worse.

[*There is a chorus of angry exclamations from the crowd.*]

JOE [*encouraged by this support*]. We ain't agoin' to work no more less you puts back for home.

KEENEY [*fiercely*]. You ain't, ain't you?

JOE. No; and the law courts'll say we was right.

KEENEY. To hell with your law courts! We're at sea now and I'm the law on this ship! [*Edging up toward the harpooner.*] And every mother's son of you what don't obey orders goes in irons.

[*There are more angry exclamations from the crew. Mrs. Keeney appears in the doorway in rear and looks on with startled eyes. None of the men notice her.*]

JOE [*with bravado*]. Then we're agoin' to mutiny and take the old hooker home ourselves. Ain't we, boys?

[*As he turns his head to look at the others, Keeney's fist shoots out to the side of his jaw. Joe goes down in a heap and lies there. Mrs. Keeney gives a shriek and hides her face in her hands. The men pull out their sheath knives and start a rush, but stop when they find themselves confronted by the revolvers of Keeney and the Mate.*]

KEENEY [*his eyes and voice snapping*]. Hold still! [*The men stand huddled together in a sullen silence. Keeney's voice is full of mockery.*] You's found out it ain't safe to mutiny on this ship, ain't you? And now git for'ard where ye belong, and — [*He gives Joe's body a contemptuous kick.*] drag him with you. And remember. the first man of ye I see shirkin' I'll shoot dead as sure as there's a sea under us, and you can tell the rest the same. Git for'ard now! Quick! [*The men leave in cowed silence, carrying Joe with them. Keeney turns to the Mate with a short laugh and puts his revolver back in his pocket.*] Best get up on deck, Mr. Slocum, and see to it they don't try none of their skulkin' tricks. We'll have to keep an eye peeled from now on. I know 'em.

MATE. Yes, sir.

[*He goes out, right. Keeney hears his wife's hysterical weeping and turns around in surprise — then walks slowly to her side.*]

KEENEY [*putting an arm around her shoulder — with gruff tenderness*]. There, there, Annie. Don't be feared. It's all past and gone.

MRS. KEENEY [*shrinking away from him*]. Oh, I can't bear it! I can't bear it any longer!

KEENEY [*gently*]. Can't bear what, Annie?

MRS. KEENEY [*hysterically*]. All this horrible brutality, and these brutes of men, and this terrible ship, and this prison cell of a room, and the ice all around, and the silence.

[*After this outburst she calms down and wipes her eyes with her handkerchief.*]

KEENEY [*after a pause during which he looks down at her with a puzzled frown*]. Remember, I warn't hankerin' to have you come on this voyage, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY. I wanted to be with you, David, don't you see? I didn't want to wait back there in the house all alone as I've been doing these last six years since we were married — waiting, and watching, and fearing — with nothing to keep my mind occupied — not able to go back teaching school on account of being Dave Keeney's wife. I used to dream of sailing on the great, wide, glorious ocean. I wanted to be by your side in the danger and vigorous life of it all. I wanted to see you the hero they make you out to be in Homeport. And instead [*Her voice grows tremulous*] all I find is ice and cold — and brutality! [*Her voice breaks.*]

KEENEY. I warned you what it'd be, Annie. "Whalin' ain't no ladies' tea party," I says to you, "and you better stay to home where you've got all your woman's comforts." [*Shaking his head.*] But you was so set on it.

MRS. KEENEY [*wearily*]. Oh, I know it isn't your fault, David. You see, I didn't believe you. I guess I was dreaming about the old Vikings in the story books and I thought you were one of them.

KEENEY [*protestingly*]. I done my best to make it as cozy and comfortable as could be. [*Mrs. Keeney looks around her in wild scorn.*] I even sent to the city for that organ for ye, thinkin' it might be soothin' to ye to be playin' it times when they was calms and things was dull like.

MRS. KEENEY [*wearily*]. Yes, you were very kind, David. I know that. [*She goes to left and lifts the curtains from the porthole and looks out — then suddenly bursts forth*]: I won't stand it — I can't stand it — pent up by these walls like a prisoner. [*She runs over to him and throws her arms around him, weeping. He puts his arm protectingly over her shoulders.*] Take me away from here, David! If I don't get away from here, out of this terrible ship, I'll go mad! Take me home, David! I can't think any more. I feel as if the cold and the silence were crushing down on my brain. I'm afraid. Take me home!

KEENEY [*holds her at arm's length and looks at her face anxiously*]. Best go to bed, Annie. You ain't yourself. You got fever. Your eyes look so strange like. I ain't never seen you look this way before.

MRS. KEENEY [*laughing hysterically*]. It's the ice and the cold and the silence — they'd make any one look strange.

KEENEY [*soothingly*]. In a month or two, with good luck, three at the most, I'll have her filled with ile and then we'll give her everything she'll stand and p'int for home.

Mrs. Keeney. But we can't wait for that — I can't wait. I want to get home. And the men won't wait. They want to get home. It's cruel, it's brutal for you to keep them. You must sail back. You've got no excuse. There's clear water to the south now. If you've a heart at all you've got to turn back.

Keeney [*harshly*]. I can't, Annie.

Mrs. Keeney. Why can't you?

Keeney. A woman couldn't rightly understand my reason.

Mrs. Keeney [*wildly*]. Because it's a stubborn reason. Oh, I heard you talking with the second mate. You're afraid the other captains will sneer at you because you didn't come back with a full ship. You want to live up to your silly reputation even if you do have to beat and starve men and drive me mad to do it.

Keeney [*his jaw set stubbornly*]. It ain't that, Annie. Them skippers would never dare sneer to my face. It ain't so much what any one'd say — but — [*He hesitates, struggling to express his meaning*] you see — I've always done it — since my first voyage as skipper. I always come back — with a full ship — and — it don't seem right not to — somehow. I been always first whalin' skipper out o' Homeport, and — don't you see my meanin', Annie? [*He glances at her. She is not looking at him, but staring dully in front of her, not hearing a word he is saying.*] Annie! [*She comes to herself with a start.*] Best turn in, Annie, there's a good woman. You ain't well.

Mrs. Keeney [*resisting his attempts to guide her to the door in rear*]. David! Won't you please turn back?

Keeney [*gently*]. I can't, Annie — not yet awhile. You don't see my meanin'. I got to git the ile.

Mrs. Keeney. It'd be different if you needed the money, but you don't. You've got more than plenty.

Keeney [*impatiently*]. It ain't the money I'm thinkin' of. D'you think I'm as mean as that?

Mrs. Keeney [*dully*]. No — I don't know — I can't understand. [*Intensely.*] Oh, I want to be home in the old house once more, and see my own kitchen again, and hear a woman's voice talking to me and be able to talk to her. Two years! It seems so long ago — as if I'd been dead and could never go back.

Keeney [*worried by her strange tone and the far-away look in her eyes.*] Best go to bed, Annie. You ain't well.

Mrs. Keeney [*not appearing to hear him*]. I used to be lonely when you were away. I used to think Homeport was a stupid, monotonous place. Then I used to go down on the beach, especially when it was windy and the breakers were rolling in, and I'd dream of the fine, free life you must be leading. [*She gives a laugh which is half a sob.*] I used to love the sea then. [*She pauses; then continues with slow intensity.*] But now — I don't ever want to see the sea again.

Keeney [*thinking to humor her*]. 'Tis no fit place for a woman, that's sure. I was a fool to bring ye.

Mrs. Keeney [*after a pause — passing her hand over her eyes with a gesture of pathetic weariness*]. How long would it take us to reach home — if we started now?

Keeney [*frowning*]. 'Bout two months, I reckon, Annie, with fair luck.

Mrs. Keeney [*counts on her fingers — then murmurs with a rapt smile*]. That would be August, the latter part of August, wouldn't it? It was on the twenty-fifth of August we were married, David, wasn't it?

Keeney [*trying to conceal the fact that her memories have moved him — gruffly*]. Don't *you* remember?

Mrs. Keeney [*vaguely — again passes her hand over her eyes*]. My memory is leaving me — up here in the ice. It was so long ago. [*A pause — then she smiles dreamily.*] It's June now. The lilacs will be all in bloom in the front yard — and the climbing roses on the trellis to the side of the house — they're budding —

[*She suddenly covers her face with her hands and commences to sob.*]

Keeney [*disturbed*]. Go in and rest, Annie. You're all worn out cryin' over what can't be helped.

Mrs. Keeney [*suddenly throwing her arms around his neck and clinging to him*]. You love me, don't you, David?

Keeney [*in amazed embarrassment at this outburst*]. Love you? Why d'you ask me such a question, Annie?

Mrs. Keeney [*shaking him fiercely*]. But you do, don't you, David? Tell me!

KEENEY. I'm your husband, Annie, and you're my wife. Could there be aught but love between us after all these years?

MRS. KEENEY [*shaking him again — still more fiercely*]. Then you do love me. Say it!

KEENEY [*simply*]. I do, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY [*gives a sigh of relief — her hands drop to her sides. Keeney regards her anxiously. She passes her hand across her eyes and murmurs half to herself*]: I sometimes think if we could only have had a child — [*Keeney turns away from her, deeply moved. She grabs his arm and turns him around to face her — intensely.*] And I've always been a good wife to you, haven't I, David?

KEENEY [*his voice betraying his emotion*]. No man has ever had a better, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY. And I've never asked for much from you, have I, David? Have I?

KEENEY. You know you could have all I got the power to give ye, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY [*wildly*]. Then do this, this once, for my sake, for God's sake — take me home! It's killing me, this life — the brutality and cold and horror of it. I'm going mad. I can feel the threat in the air. I can't bear the silence threatening me — day after gray day and every day the same. I can't bear it. [*Sobbing.*] I'll go mad, I know I will. Take me home, David, if you love me as you say. I'm afraid. For the love of God, take me home!

[*She throws her arms around him, weeping against his shoulder. His face betrays the tremendous struggle going on within him. He holds her out at arm's length, his expression softening. For a moment his shoulders sag, he becomes old, his iron spirit weakens as he looks at her tear-stained face.*]

KEENEY [*dragging out the words with an effort*]. I'll do it, Annie — for your sake — if you say it's needful for ye.

MRS. KEENEY [*with wild joy — kissing him*]. God bless you for that, David!

[*He turns away from her silently and walks toward the companionway. Just at that moment there is a clatter of footsteps on the stairs and the Second Mate enters the cabin.*]

MATE [*excitedly*]. The ice is breakin' up to no'the'ard, sir. There's a clear passage through the floe, and clear water beyond, the lookout says.

[*Keeney straightens himself like a man coming out of a trance. Mrs. Keeney looks at the Mate with terrified eyes.*]

KEENEY [*dazedly — trying to collect his thoughts*]. A clear passage? To no'the'ard?

MATE. Yes, sir.

KEENEY [*his voice suddenly grim with determination*]. Then get her ready and we'll drive her through.

MATE. Aye, aye, sir.

MRS. KEENEY [*appealingly*]. David! David!

KEENEY [*not heeding her*]. Will the men turn to willin' or must we drag 'em out?

MATE. They'll turn to willin' enough. You put the fear o' God into 'em, sir. They're meek as lambs.

KEENEY. Then drive 'em — both watches. [*With grim determination.*] They's whale t'other side o' this floe and we're agoin' to git 'em.

MATE. Aye, aye, sir.

[*He goes out hurriedly. A moment later there is the sound of scuffling feet from the deck outside and the Mate's voice shouting orders.*]

KEENEY [*speaking aloud to himself — derisively*]. And I was agoin' home like a yaller dog!

MRS. KEENEY [*imploringly*]. David!

KEENEY [*sternly*]. Woman, you ain't adoin' right when you meddle in men's business and weaken 'em. You can't know my feelin's. I got to prove a man to be a good husband for ye to take pride in. I got to git the ile, I tell ye.

MRS. KEENEY [*supplicatingly*]. David! Aren't you going home?

KEENEY [*ignoring this question — commandingly*]. You ain't well. Go and lay down a mite. [*He starts for the door.*] I got to git on deck.

[*He goes out. She cries after him in anguish, "David!" A pause. She passes her hand across her eyes — then commences to laugh hysterically and goes to the organ. She sits down and starts to play*

wildly an old hymn, "There is rest for the weary." Keeney reënters from the doorway to the deck and stands looking at her angrily. He comes over and grabs her roughly by the shoulder.]

KEENEY. Woman, what foolish mockin' is this? [*She laughs wildly and he starts back from her in alarm.*] Annie! What is it? [*She doesn't answer him. Keeney's voice trembles.*] Don't you know me, Annie?

[*He puts both hands on her shoulders and turns her around so that he can look into her eyes. She stares up at him with a stupid expression, a vague smile on her lips. He stumbles away from her, and she commences softly to play the organ again.*]

KEENEY [*swallowing hard — in a hoarse whisper, as if he had difficulty in speaking*]. You said — you was agoin' mad — God!

[*A long wail is heard from the deck above, "Ah, bl-o-o-o-ow!" A moment later the Mate's face appears through the skylight. He cannot see Mrs. Keeney.*]

MATE [*in great excitement*]. Whales, sir — a whole school of 'em — off the star-b'd quarter 'bout five miles away — big ones!

KEENEY [*galvanized into action*]. Are you lowerin' the boats?

MATE. Yes, sir.

KEENEY [*with grim decision*]. I'm acomin' with ye.

MATE. Aye, aye, sir. [*Jubilantly.*] You'll git the ile now right enough, sir.

[*His head is withdrawn and he can be heard shouting orders.*]

KEENEY [*turning to his wife*]. Annie! Did you hear him? I'll git the ile. [*She doesn't answer or seem to know he is there. He gives a hard laugh which is almost a groan.*] I know you're foolin' me, Annie. You ain't out of your mind — [*Anxiously.*] be you? I'll git the ile now right enough — jest a little while longer, Annie — then we'll turn home'ard. I can't turn back now, you see that, don't you? I've got to git the ile. [*In sudden terror.*] Answer me! You ain't mad, be you?

[*She keeps on playing the organ, but makes no reply. The Mate's face appears again through the skylight.*]

MATE. All ready, sir.

[*Keeney turns his back on his wife and strides to the doorway, where he stands for a moment and looks back at her in anguish, fighting to control his feelings.*]

MATE. Comin', sir?

KEENEY [*his face suddenly grows hard with determination*]. Aye.

[*He turns abruptly and goes out. Mrs. Keeney does not appear to notice his departure. Her whole attention seems centered in the organ. She sits with half-closed eyes, her body swaying a little from side to side to the rhythm of the hymn. Her fingers move faster and faster and she is playing wildly and discordantly as the*

Curtain falls.]

THE NURSERY MAID OF HEAVEN

A Miracle Play

By Thomas Wood Stevens

Based on a story by Vernon Lee.

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The Nursery Maid of Heaven was first produced by the School of the Drama, Carnegie Institute of Technology, Pittsburgh, Pa., on the night of November 14, 1919, with the following cast:

Sister Benvenuta.....*Hazel Beck.*
Sister Grimana.....*Alicia S. Guthrie.*
Sister Rosalba.....*Grey McAuley.*
The Abbess.....*Dorothy Rubinstein.*
The Sister Sacristan.....*Inez D. R. Hazel.*
Atalanta Badoer [*a novice*].....*Carolyn McCampbell.*
Abbe Filosi.....*Wm. R. Dean.*
The Puppet Man.....*Lawrence Paquin.*
Beelzebubb Satanasso.....*James S. Church.*

Scene I: The Chapter-Room of the Convent of Our Lady of the Rosebush, Cividale.
Scene II: Benvenuta's cell.
Scene III: The Chapter-Room.

Time: *Early in the eighteenth century. Some days elapse between scenes.*

Stage settings and properties by Alexander Wyckoff and David S. Gaither.
Lightning by Arleigh B. Williamson.
Costumes by Sara E. Bennett and Lela May Aultman.
Music by Charles Pearson.

The amateur and professional stage rights to The Nursery Maid of Heaven are reserved by the author. Applications for permission to produce the play should be addressed to Frank Shay, Stewart & Kidd Company, Cincinnati, Ohio. No performance may be given without his consent.

THE NURSERY MAID OF HEAVEN

A Miracle Play

By Thomas Wood Stevens

[Scene I: *Atalanta, the novice, sits, rebellious and sullen, on the steps of the Mother Superior's daïs. From time to time nuns and novices pass across the stage to the left, on their way to the refectory. Sister Grimana, an old nun, comes down to Atalanta purposefully.*]

Grimana. Sulking again, are you? Waiting for Sister Benvenuta, are you?

[*Atalanta is silent.*]

Remembering things that are really no concern of yours; and thinking they concern you because you remember them — doubtless quite inaccurately. I know. It's a way of the Badoer family — and of the Loredani, too, for that matter. When you were a child there was confiture with the bread — and you threw away the crust; and they let you do it, and now you can't find your vocation.

[*She taps her foot impatiently.*]

Well — well — will you come?

[*Atalanta is still silent, her face hard with resolution.*]

I might mention it to the Sister Sacristan. She'd fetch you.

[*Atalanta gives her a look of scornful disgust.*]

It's as well you didn't say that in so many words, Sister.

[*Atalanta looks straight before her, a statue of silence.*]

Perhaps there is some one you would prefer to have me call, before the Sister Sacristan comes to fetch you? Sister Rosalba?

[*No response.*]

So it must be Sister Benvenuta, must it?

Atalanta. I would speak with her.

Grimana. Oho! You would speak with her! And so you shall — for the love I bore your mother when we were children together. But what good she can do you, with her chatter and laughing — childish laughing and chatter — I can't see. I'll send her to you. And meantime, count your buttons. That's my advice. Count your buttons.

[*She comes close and speaks more confidentially.*]

That helps greatly — it did when I was your age.

[*Grimana goes off. Atalanta mechanically runs her fingers over the buttons of her novice's cape; as she arrives at the end of the row, she mutters.*]

Atalanta. Even you, Benvenuta!

[*At the second word she rises abruptly, her hands on the veil.*]

Heaven forgive me!

[*She tears off the veil just as Benvenuta enters from the left. Benvenuta limps down around the Mother Superior's throne, and on seeing Atalanta with her veil off, bursts into laughter.*]

Atalanta. Even you, Benvenuta! What amuses you so?

Benvenuta. It's your hair. It's so funny — it's so long since I've seen your hair, Atalanta, dear.

Atalanta [*sullenly*]. It's not that I want to talk to you about. You needn't have laughed.

Benvenuta. I know, dear. I shouldn't have laughed, but I always do. I'm so unworthy. I can't seem to help it, though I tell myself, often and often, that it's trifling and worldly to laugh so much, and undignified, too, before the children and novices. I will try not to laugh, Atalanta. Sister Grimana said you wanted me. What is it, dear?

[*She looks at Atalanta and smothers another laugh.*]

Put on your veil, child.

Atalanta. Don't call me child — I'm

only three years younger than you, and I'm taller.

[*She puts on the veil again, still sullen.*]

BENVENUTA. You're only a novice and I call you a child — very properly, too. And if you want me to talk to you, you must listen — like a good child.

[*A step is heard approaching and a rattle of keys; Atalanta pulls at Benvenuta's dress as if to draw her down beside her.*]

ATALANTA. It's the Sister Sacristan. Now she'll make me go, and there's something you must tell me — you must — I beg of you.

[*The Sister Sacristan comes in and goes straight to Atalanta, ignoring Benvenuta. Her keys are audible as she walks.*]

THE SISTER SACRISTAN. Well, Mistress Perverse and Disobedient? Not come to reason yet?

BENVENUTA. Pray you, Sister Sacristan, pardon her. Let me speak with her a little while — only a little while. Her tasks can wait —

SISTER SACRISTAN. Her tasks! Praise the Blessed Mother, in this noble house we need not depend on the novices for anything. It's not that — it's the discipline in the pigeon cot. The Mother Abbess will be displeased —

BENVENUTA. Pray you, Sister Sacristan. This novice has asked of me some spiritual admonition. She is my kinswoman, and I cannot refuse it. So I ask you for a little time with her, to speak to her of spiritual things, and perhaps bring her some comfort, to the end that her holy vocation may the sooner come. I ask it in humility, Sister Sascristan.

SISTER SACRISTAN [*crossing to the closet, which she unlocks*]. Admonition, eh?

[*She takes out some vestments, which she hangs over her arm, closing the door.*]

BENVENUTA. I ask you to remember, Sister, that last Thursday I took upon myself the vexed matter of the hair of the two new novices, and that it throve in my charge.

SISTER SACRISTAN. Yes — throve. You so coddled them that they cried for you each night after, and are more trouble to the lay sisters than ever. But since she's your kinswoman — have it as you will. I look for little effect from your admonitions, I may as well tell you.

[*She removes her keys and goes out, without locking the closet.*]

ATALANTA. That was good of you, Benvenuta. Now, listen to me. I am unworthy. I am unhappy. I feel no call. Tell me — tell me about the world, Sister Benvenuta — I beg you, tell me —

BENVENUTA. I will tell you of God's love, and of this holy life —

ATALANTA [*leading her to the stairway, where she sits down*]. Yes — I know. But first, tell me about the world.

BENVENUTA. I only tell you by way of admonition — that you may see how hollow is the world, and full of delusion —

ATALANTA. I understand you. Go on.

[*She draws Benvenuta down beside her.*]

BENVENUTA. You must know then, that I — even I, Sister Benvenuta, was a most worldly little girl. I can remember so clearly how I used to run madly through the gardens, and roll on the grass like — like a wild puppy, and bury my face in the roses — till they scratched my nose and the warm scent made me dizzy. And then I would climb on the wall and watch the barges go by, with the strong men sculling them, and the women under the awnings sorting crabs and prawns.

ATALANTA. Tell me about the barge people.

BENVENUTA. That was all I saw of them. And then they would take me to my lady mother, of a forenoon, while she was having her hair powdered and curled; and there would be a black page bringing her chocolate, and her serving cavalier would be leaning beside her mirror taking snuff.

ATALANTA. Yes — tell me about the cavalier servant.

BENVENUTA. That was all I ever saw of him. But he was very worldly, I am sure.

ATALANTA. I wish you had seen more of him. And your mother? Did she have little children?

BENVENUTA. You know well I was the youngest of our family. That was why

I was destined for the benefice we possessed in this high born convent.

ATALANTA. Tell me about your father?

BENVENUTA. I used only to see him once in a month, and I was much frightened of him — he was so noble and so just.

ATALANTA. Oh, he was a father of that sort, was he?

BENVENUTA. And when he did receive me, he had a handkerchief like a turban around his head, and horn spectacles on his nose, and he would be making gold with an astrologer, or putting devils in retorts. That was what he said he was doing, but I know now that he deceived me; he was a very worldly man, though he was so noble and just.

ATALANTA. Tell me, Benvenuta, when you were in the world, did you ever see mothers and babies — tiny babies — not old at all?

BENVENUTA. The only one was in the picture in our chapel — the panel in the center with the Blessed Mother and the little Child Christ. He was so sweet, and his eyes were as if they would open in a moment and then I should know what color of eyes they were.

ATALANTA [*glancing toward the Sacristy closet*]. And that's why you so love the Bambino they keep in the Sacristy closet?

BENVENUTA. Yes.

ATALANTA [*more passionately*]. And was it easy for you, Benvenuta — always easy in your heart, to give up the world?

BENVENUTA. I was destined for this, dear.

ATALANTA [*rising*]. I am not sure. I was not destined. I am —

BENVENUTA. Ssh! Dear Atalanta. Be quiet. Be calm. Yes, I was worldly, and I gave it up willingly —

ATALANTA. Yes, it was easy for you, and so you think it should be for me. You never even saw a little baby with her mother. You were destined, and you were the youngest —

BENVENUTA. It was for the best. I was unworthy, but I gave up the world willingly —

ATALANTA [*bitterly*]. Willingly — you were lame, and —

[*She stops, biting her lips. There is a pause.*]

BENVENUTA. Yes. I was a little lame. But I was a worldly little girl.

ATALANTA. Forgive me, dear sister. I meant no hurt.

BENVENUTA. You did not hurt me.

[*Another pause.*]

ATALANTA. Dear Benvenuta, one thing I must tell you. I must. It happened just before I came here.

[*Benvenuta looks at her soberly.*]

BENVENUTA. Are you sure it is to me you should tell it?

ATALANTA. It is not a sin — not something I could confess, dear. It was this. Just as you looked over the wall at the barges, it was. In our gardens there was a time when the old gardener brought a vinedresser to help him. And the vinedresser's wife came with his dinner and their baby. And I came on them eating under the ilex trees, very secretly, of course. And the baby was clambering over her. She was no older than I am now — the vinedresser's wife. And she fed the baby at her breast in the deep shade under the ilexes. And I talked to her. Then the old gardener came, and of course I walked away, very haughtily, as became a daughter of the house. But hear me, sister. I cannot forget her, the vinedresser's wife with the baby clambering over her, under the shade of the ilex trees. I cannot put her out of my thoughts.

BENVENUTA. I understand you, dear. I cannot put out of my thoughts the poor little Bambino in the Sacristy closet all the year around, shut up with the saint's bones and the spare vestments, and he with only a piece of stiff purple and gold stuff around his middle.

ATALANTA. I cannot think that the same. The vinedresser's baby was alive — so alive.

BENVENUTA. It is much the same, I think.

ATALANTA. Anyway, I am glad I told you, Benvenuta. Why can I not forget about it?

BENVENUTA [*laying her hand on Atalanta's head*]. It would be better if you could forget it, Atalanta. You must go now.

ATALANTA. One moment — don't take your hand away. I had to tell somebody.

[*Both look off in a sort of dreamy ecstasy, thinking of the two babies.*]

Grimana enters again. Atalanta rises.]

ATALANTA. I am full of thankfulness, Sister Benvenuta. I will go to my task.

[*Atalanta bows her head and follows Grimana out. A muffled droning chorus is heard from the chapel. Benvenuta watches the others go off, and then speaks to the Bambino through the door of the Sacristy closet.*]

BENVENUTA. My dear — my dear little Great One, can you hear my voice through the door? Dear little child Christ, I am so sorry for you, alone for days and days in the closet with the holy relics and the wax lights. And at night it must be very cold for you. I wish I might touch you, dear little Great One, with my hands.

[*She tries the door and, finding it unfastened, draws back from it a moment.*]

It is open; the Sister Sacristan has left it unlocked. For this I am thankful, for I am sure you put it into her mind to leave it so — or that you by your divine power and foresight put it out of her mind to lock it as she intended.

[*She opens the door and looks in.*]

If only I could get appointed Sacristan! But I am too young and being lame would prevent my getting on to the step-ladders, as a Sacristan must. But I would never leave you alone among the relics in their cotton-wool, little Great One. And now — just for a moment lest the Sister Sacristan come back — I will take you out of the closet.

[*She brings out the Bambino.*]

I will show you the chapter room, for while you have seen all places, and the high heavens and all the hells, it will be pleasant to you to see the chapter room, after so long in the closet. See, yonder is the seat of the Mother Abbess. She is very great, and very holy, and of the high house of the Morosini. And that way is to the refectory and the work room. And that way is to the chapel — up the stairs. And up that way are our cells, where I sleep and where I pray to dream of you, little Great One. Touch my cheek, I pray you. . . . How cold your hands are! . . . Touch my cheek as she said the vinedresser's babe touched his mother's —

[*She stops suddenly, and then reverently returns the Bambino to his place. She kneels before the open door.*]

Forgive me, dear little Child Christ. I spoke not in vain glory. But all my life I have waited, not knowing for what . . . but happy . . . dreaming that sometime . . . If it be a sin I will confess it — I will.

[*Again the rattle of keys is heard. Benvenuta stands up hurriedly and speaks in a half whisper.*]

She is coming back to lock the closet. But I will get you a coat for the cold nights. Your hands were so cold. I will get you a warm coat — that I promise, dear little Great One.

[*She closes the door and stands before it looking consciously innocent, as the Sister Sacristan enters. The Sister Sacristan is not deceived, however.*]

SISTER SACRISTAN. By your leave, Sister Benvenuta.

[*She ostentatiously locks the closed door.*]

BENVENUTA. Sister Sacristan, I trust the novice you left in my charge has returned to her task.

SISTER SACRISTAN]. I trust she has.

BENVENUTA [*after a pause*]. I wish I might help you with your duties sometimes, Sister.

SISTER SACRISTAN. I do not need you, little sister.

BENVENUTA. I am sorry.

[*Mechanically she counts her buttons.*]

[*Enter the Abbess.*]

THE ABBESS [*to the Sacristan*]. Sister, go into the chapel and tell the Reverend Father that the Bolognese puppet man is waiting, and say that I wish to see him here; and bid the Reverend Father bring the manuscript of his poem for Shrove Tuesday.

[*The Sister Sacristan goes out. Benvenuta remains, waiting patiently for a word from the Abbess.*]

Well, my little sister?

BENVENUTA. I pray you, Mother.

ABBESS. I listen, little sister.

BENVENUTA. It is about the little Child Christ. I pray you that a coat may be made for him — a warm coat of soft silk; for at Christmas he lies out in the draughty manger before the altar, and

even at other times he is very cold at night here in the Sacristy closet. And I pray you, Mother?

ABBESS. I listen.

[*Reënter the Sister Sacristan.*]

BENVENUTA. That I may help with the making of the coat, for all that I sew so badly.

ABBESS [*smiling*]. Truly, our little sister Benvenuta Loredan was born to be the nursery-maid of Heaven.

SISTER SACRISTAN. Is it for me to know also, Mother?

ABBESS. Our little sister wishes that a coat of warm silk be made for the little Bambino, against next Christmas in the cold of the chapel.

SISTER SACRISTAN. I suspected something of that kind.

ABBESS. You do not approve, sister?

SISTER SACRISTAN. No, mother. It would be taking the time and money from the redressing of the skeleton of Saint Prosdoscimus, which is a most creditable relic, of unquestioned authenticity, with real diamond loops in his eye holes; this skeleton ought to be made fit to exhibit for veneration. And besides, this Bambino never had any clothes, and so far as I know never wanted any. The purple sash is only for modesty's sake. And as for such a new-fangled proposal coming from Sister Benvenuta — that alone —

ABBESS. That will do. Fie, fie, little sister. The Sacred Bambino is not your serving Cavalier, that you should wish to cover him with silk and velvet. Is the Reverend Father coming?

SISTER SACRISTAN. Immediately, mother. He only stayed to gather his manuscript.

ABBESS. Call in the man with the puppets.

[*Exit Sister Sacristan.*]

And now, little sister, you may go. You see it is not wise, . . . your thought for the Bambino.

BENVENUTA. No, mother. I see it is not wise.

[*Benvenuta goes up the staircase and off at the left.—The Abbess seats herself in the chair of State. The Father Confessor comes in from the Chapel.*]

ABBESS. You are welcome, Father.

ABBE FILOSI [*bowing very low*]. Happy greetings, Reverendissima.

ABBESS. I have sent for you because the puppet man, the Bolognese one you sent for, has come to make his bargain for the Shrove-tide play, and I wished you to be present, lest he fail to serve your inspiration worthily.

ABBE FILOSI. I am grateful for your care in the matter, Reverendissima.

[*Enter Sister Sacristan.*]

ABBESS. The fellow is waiting?

[*The Sister Sacristan bows.*]

Show him in.

[*The Sister Sacristan goes out.*]

And now, Father, I pray that you will make terms for your play, as you please.

ABBE FILOSI. Perhaps I had better not do that, Reverendissima. Poets are proverbially improvident —

ABBESS. That does not matter in the least. Whatever he charges, I shall beat him down.

[*The Sister Sacristan brings in the Puppet Man, who carries a bag of his puppets on his arm. He bows extravagantly to the Abbess.*]

PUPPET MAN. Excellenza Reverendissima, my prayers shall in the future be lightened by the memory of your presence. Reverend Father, I am humbly your servant.

[*The Abbess nods to Father Filosi.*]

ABBE FILOSI. You have been summoned here, sir, with regard to the Shrove Tuesday play which her Excellenza condescends to give for the edification of the friends of this noble convent. She has commissioned me to write the poem, and she graciously proposes to allow you to perform it with your puppets.

PUPPET MAN. I am honored, and in me all my craft is honored.

ABBE FILOSI. I have here the manuscript of my poor device.

PUPPET MAN. I cannot have so excellent a work so slightly spoken of.

ABBE FILOSI. A trifle . . . a trifle. But I trust, when you have done your part, it may amuse the novices and the ladies — noble guests of Our Lady of the Rosebush.

PUPPET MAN. Is it from the gospels, or a saint's story?

ABBE FILOSI. Humbly, it is the story of Judith.

PUPPET MAN. Humbly, as an artist, I am filled with delight. And I have for it just the figures you could wish. A Judith, lovely beyond the power of song,

and a Prince, heavy with gold, and a cavalier for the lady —

ABBE FILOSI. That will not serve. In my play she goes with only her maid-servant to the tent of the Holophernes.

PUPPET MAN. It is not usual, in Venice. Will it not be deemed strange by the ladies present?

ABBE FILOSI. Better so, than its author be deemed ignorant by the learned Reverendissima, who will grace your performance personally.

PUPPET MAN [*stiffly*]. I bow to your learning, Reverend Father.

ABBE FILOSI. My poem will require of you some artistry, and not all of the stale and accustomed sort.

[*The Puppet Man bows.*]

I shall require, for example, that the head of the Holophernes be actually and visibly severed.

PUPPET MAN. I will undertake it, and moreover, I will promise a goodly flow of red blood from the corpus of the Holophernes.

ABBE FILOSI. Excellent. Further, there is required a Triumph of Judith, in a car of state, and a figure of Time, speaking, and a Religion, out of the clouds, who speaks some verse in praise of the Reverendissima and of the noble house of the Morosini. All this must be carried out precisely.

PUPPET MAN. All this I undertake, seeing how famous is this convent, and of how illustrious a house is its Abbessa. Suffer me to inquire if the entire poem is of a lofty and tragic nature.

ABBE FILOSI. Certainly.

PUPPET MAN. This is a great honor to me, but a ruinous one as well. For I see I shall have no opportunity to bring on my most potent figures — my Harlequino with the seven wires, and —

ABBE FILOSI. Harlequino does not appear in the poem.

PUPPET MAN. But might he not appear in an interlude? Let me suggest, in all humility, that I might perform an interlude between the Harlequino and the serving-wench of Judith, after the death of the Holophernes?

ABBE FILOSI. Dio, dio — what a profanation!

ABBESS. Come, come, your Reverence, I see no profanation in it. We must not be too severe — too lofty. Think of our guests, and of the novices, mere children in heart — who will be witnessing our play. Let there be something in it for the liking of all, I should say.

ABBE FILOSI. But, Reverendissima —

PUPPET MAN. I could assure you of the success of the poem, if you would permit it.

ABBESS. I am sure it will be permitted. And now, sir, there are some other matters to be settled. First, we shall require that you bring here your puppets, in advance of the play, for our inspection, lest there be anything ungodly and unfit about them.

PUPPET MAN. It is the custom. I have brought some; and you shall have the others when I have conned the reverend Father's poem, and know which ones shall be required.

[*Opens his bag and takes out puppets.*]

Here is a lady who might serve for Judith. And here a Prince, though I have a richer one, better perhaps for the Holophernes. And here a devil — a Satanasso, and here —

ABBESS. Leave them all on the table. I will have them examined at leisure. Now, sir, tell me what you expect to be paid for this performance?

PUPPET MAN [*fingering his manuscript*]. Reverendissima, considering the difficulties of the poem, and the Holophernes to be visibly beheaded, and the great fame of this convent, that is said to require of every novice sixteen quarterings to her crest and a thousand ducats of dowry, and considering the illustrious family of which the Abbessa herself descends — I will perform the poem in the best manner for twelve ducats.

ABBESSA. Considering just the matters you mention, and the honor to you to bring your puppets into this convent at all, you shall have five ducats.

PUPPET MAN. Five ducats — Reverendissima, I cannot have heard you aright — five ducats.

ABBESS. Five ducats.

PUPPET MAN. Mercy of the Saints! Five ducats for Shrove Tuesday, and a Holophernes to be visibly beheaded — in a most illustrious convent, too. It is ruin to me, Reverendissima — black ruin.

ABBESS. Five ducats you shall have.

PUPPET MAN [*starting to put his pup-*

pets back in the bag]. It is not possible, Reverendissima. No one of my craft could do it — even the worst of them would ask more than I have. Mere jugglers and bunglers from Padua would ask twenty ducats. And the fame of this convent! I see I have been deceived,—

ABBESS. Be silent, sir. You cannot trifle with me. Put down your trinkets. Do you know who I am, and of what family in the world? Well, sir?

PUPPET MAN [*slowly putting down his puppets again*]. Maybe it will profit me in the sight of the Saints —

ABBESS. I need not warn you further. Be prepared for the performance in the best style against Shrove Tuesday. And if all goes well, I may add a ducat to your fee.

[*She taps a gong on the table, and the Sister Sacristan enters. The Puppet Man, dismissed, bows himself out, clutching the manuscript to his breast. The Sacristan follows him out, returning at once.*]

Now, Father, since the play is yours, it shall also be yours to pass on the propriety of the figures.

ABBE FILOSI. I do not seek the responsibility, Reverendissima. Will you not excuse me?

ABBESS. You have some intention in this, Father?

ABBE FILOSI. Will you not excuse me?

ABBESS [*smiling*]. Certainly not. What troubles you about it?

ABBE FILOSI. Reverendissima, I would gladly have passed it in silence. Your wisdom in matters of the world — and of the Church — is greater than mine. But look you now. This Judith I think shows more of her bosom than is seemly.

ABBESS [*with asperity*]. I will instruct you. By the laws on the serene Republic, a Venetian lady may show one-half of her bosom and no more, and there is no immodesty in the proceeding. This law the lady Judith obeys.

ABBE FILOSI. I do not dissent from your wisdom, nor from the law of Venice. Still, it seems to me there would be more propriety in it if we were to have a collarette of tissue pinned about her — the eyes of all the novices, remember —

ABBESS. I remember also our guests, many of them ladies of the first houses, who would certainly take it amiss, and as a reflection upon themselves —

ABBE FILOSI. I wish with all my heart, Reverendissima, you had excused me.

ABBESS [*turning to Sister Sacristan*]. I will ask the Sisters Grimana Emo and Rosalba Foscarini to examine the puppets.

[*The Sister Sacristan goes out.*]

Their learning in theology may not be profound, but they know the world's judgment, coming as they do of the first families.

[*The Abbe Filosi bows low.*]

ABBE FILOSI. I shall be at your service, Reverendissima.

ABBESS. I thank you enough for the poem. Farewell.

[*He bows himself out, at right, as Sister Grimana and Sister Rosalba enter left.*]

GRIMANA. You have sent for us, Mother?

ABBESS. In the matter of the Shrove Tuesday play — yes. The puppets will be brought in advance, as usual. These few the show-man has already left.

GRIMANA. You wish them to be looked over, as usual?

ABBESS. Not quite as usual. This year they are to appear in a play or poem which the Father Confessor has written for us — dealing with the story of Judith. Now the good Abbe, though a man of great learning and a graceful poet withal, has not the advantage of family that some of our sisters —

GRIMANA. And some of our guests —

ROSALBA. I remember once, at a fête in the gardens of my uncle, the Doge —

ABBESS. I need instruct you no further. I do not wish anything ungodly or unfit to appear; nor do I wish anything in the play to suggest that there is any impropriety in the illustrious audience.

GRIMANA. I understand, Mother. It is chiefly a question of the dressing of the ladies.

ABBESS. Precisely. I shall leave it in your charge. Remembering, Sister Grimana, the laws of Venice and the customs of the house of your father, the most illustrious Admiral, and you Sister Rosalba, the fêtes in the gardens of your uncle, the Doge — surely it will be properly cared for.

[*Exit the Abbess.*]

GRIMANA. All this because we have been given a bourgeois Confessor —

ROSALBA. No matter for that, Sister. I love puppets. We had once a puppet festival, when they played the whole history of the Serene Republic, and there were great ships with puppet sailors —

[*They begin to separate the puppets with their wires and strings. Enter Sister Benvenuta.*]

BENVENUTA. Oh, the joy! Are these for the Shrove Tuesday play? If only we could show them to —

[*She glances toward the Sacristy closet, stops, and goes on.*]

Sister Rosalba, can you make them dance?

GRIMANA. Dance, forsooth — to what music, sister?

ROSALBA. You might sing for them, Sister.

GRIMANA. Aye, so I might.— Time was when I knew tunes enough.

BENVENUTA. There is a lute in the cloister — left from the musical mass. And my cousin Atalanta can play it — I should like to hear some music here.

[*She glances at the closet.*]

I'll fetch her.

[*She goes off to find Atalanta.*]

GRIMANA. What personages have we here? This lady for Judith?

ROSALBA. That can scarcely be, Judith was black haired.

GRIMANA. Nothing of the sort. She had hair of a dark red — a smoldering color.

ROSALBA. Was she not of the tribe? —

GRIMANA. What matters the tribe? In her picture by Titian, in the great hall of my father's house —

ROSALBA. We had a Judith also — by Jacopo Bellini. He was Titian's master. Her hair was black.

GRIMANA. You may be right. In our picture by Titian, now I remember it, the head was so covered with a wonderful jeweled crown that we could see little of the hair.

[*Rosalba is somewhat put down by the splendor of Grimana's Titian. Benvenuta comes back with Atalanta, who carries a lute. As she appears Grimana untangles and holds up another puppet — the Beelzebubb.*]

GRIMANA. Here's a personage of terror.

[*She turns the figure and moves it threateningly toward Benvenuta, who looks at Beelzebubb and is instantly seized with a wild fit of laughter.*]

Saint Mark preserve us! You are queerly pleased, Sister. It's not many that laugh at this figure.

ROSALBA [*reading the figure's label*]. He's Beelzebubb Satanasso, Prince of all Devils.

BENVENUTA. I pray your pardon. I could not keep from laughing. I can never look at a devil without laughing. He seems so anxious to understand, and so important with the responsibility of being Prince of all Devils.

ROSALBA. You may laugh if you like, but you should remember how ready he is to slip away with the unwary souls of people who laugh at him. How he is always in wait, by day and by night, for a wavering thought or a rift in one's faith —

GRIMANA. See here the pouch he carries to put your soul in. Truly, Sister, he might pluck you off like a cherry.

ATALANTA [*shuddering*]. Dear Sister Grimana — I beg of you —

GRIMANA. And he comes at the call of the secret thought — that's what makes him look so anxious — lest he should not be listening when you call him, and the Saints come to your soul first, and warn it —

ATALANTA. Sister Grimana!

BENVENUTA. Still, I can never look at him without laughing. He is droll. Atalanta, the lute.

[*Atalanta brings forward the lute and tries the strings. Rosalba takes up the puppet of the lady.*]

I saw the show-man. He was a most ill-favored man. Sister Rosalba, do you think he was excommunicate.

ROSALBA. Of course not. And if he were, that would not make his puppets excommunicate.

GRIMANA. What if it did? A noble convent has privileges. It would not matter to us.

ATALANTA. What shall I play?

GRIMANA. Can you play? [*She sings*]:

Go visto una colomba el cielo andare
Che la svolava su per un giardino

In mezzo 'l peto la gavea do ale
E in boca la tegniva un zenzamino!

ATALANTA. I do not know the air. But I can play a furlana.

BENVENUTA. That will be gay, Atalanta. Play a furlana, I beg you.

GRIMANA. That will serve, Sister Rosalba, your prince.

[*As Atalanta plays, Grimana manipulates the Judith and Rosalba the Prince. They are unskillful and the puppets dance crudely, but Benvenuta looks on in ecstasy, falling slowly back until she stands by the door of the closet. As she does so two or three more nuns and novices come furtively in at the back and stand watching the performance. As the dance of the puppets grows more animated the Abbess enters with the Sister Sacristan. For a moment the others do not see her, and the play continues. Then she speaks coldly and evenly.*]

ABBESS. Sisters, is this the solemn judgment I bespoke on these trinkets? Sister Grimana!

[*Grimana lays down the puppets and comes forward.*]

Sister Rosalba!

[*Rosalba also comes forward.*]

I will consider this, and will give out the penances in chapter.

GRIMANA. Yes, Mother.

[*Rosalba stands with her head bowed and her fingers run along the buttons of her cape.*]

ABBESS. There has been too much playing of lutes, too much worldly anticipation and imagining among us. So I have decided that all the holy relics shall be re-furbished, and all the vestments mended and cleaned, against Shrove Tuesday. And all other work, whether of embroidery or of whatever nature, shall wait till this be done. Sister Sacristan, let the tasks be set at once.

[*The sisters bow their heads and go out, the Sister Sacristan following Rosalba and Grimana off. Benvenuta stands still in an attitude of deep humility.*]

Well, little Sister?

BENVENUTA. Holy Mother, I am waiting for my penance.

ABBESS. Your penance, Benvenuta?

BENVENUTA. The fault was mine. I brought Atalanta with her lute. I was to blame for it all. I am heedless, and unworthy, and stained with worldliness, Mother.

ABBESS. There, there, my child. I will overlook it.

[*Benvenuta turns away, weeping furtively.*]

Come here, little Sister. Why should you weep? I have said I will overlook it.

BENVENUTA. I weep because I am unworthy to be penanced. I am nothing.

ABBESS. You are nothing? Is not this the very essence of humility? Little Sister, when I forgave you your fault, did you doubt my wisdom?

BENVENUTA. Yes, holy Mother. Oh, I have sinned in vain glory. I doubted. But I did not mean to doubt.

ABBESS [*smiling*]. Come hither, little Sister. If I must set you a penance, what would you have it be?

BENVENUTA. I would have it . . . no . . .

[*She hesitates.*]

ABBESS. Speak, Sister.

BENVENUTA. I would have you set me to the making of a coat for the Holy Bambino, as I asked of you before.

ABBESS. That would hardly be a penance. And, besides, you sew so badly.

BENVENUTA. Yes, Mother. I sew badly. And it would not really be a penance.

[*The Sister Sacristan comes in and takes from the closet some cloth and a reliquary or two. She lays them on the table, preparing them for work.*]

ABBESS. I will speak of this another time. Another time, little Sister.

[*Benvenuta stands very still. The Abbess turns to the Sister Sacristan.*]

What have you there?

SISTER SACRISTAN. The fine lawn for the surplices for His Eminence.

ABBESS. That can wait. I do not think it wise to leave the workroom alone while the relics are being done over.

[*She stands in the doorway. The Sister Sacristan is about to follow, but notices Benvenuta and goes over ostentatiously to lock the closet; then she goes out after the Abbess. Benvenuta stands still*

and her eyes go from the closet to the cloth and takes up a piece of lawn, and carries it with her to the closet door.]

BENVENUTA. Dear little Great One, I see no way but this to keep my promise. I do not understand what the Holy Mother means. But I will do my penance when she determines it. I do sew very badly, dear little Great One, but I will make the stitches slowly, night by night in my cell, and every one of them, no matter how far askew, shall have all the love of my heart drawn tight in it. I have promised you a coat, little Great One, and I will surely keep my promise.

[*She steals upstairs in the gathering darkness. The organ in the chapel is heard, faintly at first, then swelling in exultation. Slowly, after she disappears, the door of the closet opens of itself, and from within a golden light glows across the room and up the stair. The Curtain Falls.*]

[SCENE II. *In her white-walled cell, with its one high window looking over the tree tops into the night sky, Benvenuta sits alone, sewing, with great labor and difficulty, by the light of a candle. There is a soft knock, and Atalanta slips in, bringing something concealed under her cape.*]

BENVENUTA. Have you brought it, dear?

ATALANTA. I've got the coat of the gardener's child, but I fear it is not what you wanted.

BENVENUTA. I'm sure it will serve. Why do you fear for it?

ATALANTA. Because it's the little girl's coat. The boy's I could not get, for he has but the one, and the nights are so cold.

BENVENUTA. So they are — and we wouldn't have the poor lad shivering. Perhaps the girl's will serve. Did you get the thread of gold?

ATALANTA. Yes, dear.

[*There is a pause.*]

You wouldn't be happier telling me all about it? Or letting me help you, perhaps?

BENVENUTA. What good were there in that? You sew as badly as I do, child.

ATALANTA. It's not kind of you to say so.

BENVENUTA. I'm sorry, Atalanta, dear. And it's most ungrateful of me — for you are helping me — helping me very much. And as for my telling you — it's a great secret, and you should be content to know as much as you do of it.

ATALANTA. I'm afraid I know too much of it now. I'm afraid I ought to be confessing what I know already.

BENVENUTA. Confessing it. Oh, no; Atalanta, dear —

ATALANTA. I'm afraid I ought — unless you tell me more.

BENVENUTA. Oh, I see. Now, listen, my child. This matter is one concerning my devotions — a private matter surely, and needing no confessions from you.

ATALANTA. Then why these secret messages, and the gold thread, and the gardener's child's coat to be got by stealth?

BENVENUTA. For what I am doing, I would call for help from you — or from any one — from the Evil One himself, if it would serve. But it is surely no sin — though it might get you into trouble to help me with it, Atalanta, dear.

ATALANTA. Prt! That's not what I mind.

BENVENUTA. You — you love me enough to be troubled for my sake, a little, dear?

ATALANTA [*breaking out*]. I would flout the Mother Abbess to her face for you, Benvenuta. It's that you try to keep me in the dark that I mind about it. I'm going.

[*Atalanta turns sharply and goes. Benvenuta lays out the little coat of the gardener's child, and lays her lawn, already cut, upon it. She seems discouraged, turns it over, and tries again. Then with an air of resolution, she takes it up and sews fiercely, pricking her fingers, stopping to put them to her mouth, and going on doggedly.*]

BENVENUTA. I promised it, dear little Great One, and I would give my soul to keep my promise, but I fear me it will never comfort you.

[*She sews for a minute in silence. Then lifts her head with a sudden thought, and says aloud with a firm resolution*]:

I would give my soul.

[*She waits. After a moment there is a light tapping of footsteps; then a marked rapping, as of hoofs on a pavement; she shivers, and starts up in sudden terror, as Beelzebubb Satanasso confronts her. He is like the Devil Puppet in every respect, but the size of a small man. He bows low in a mechanical sort of way as if jointed. She gazes at him in wonder, laughs nervously and suppresses her laughter.*]

BEELZEBUBB [*in a voice like a Jews' harp*]. Sister Benvenuta, did I hear you call for me, or wish for me to come?

BENVENUTA. Yes, I called you.

BEELZEBUBB. You wished me to help you?

BENVENUTA. Yes.

BEELZEBUBB. You know who I am.

[*He points to his label.*]

BENVENUTA. I know. You are Beelzebubb Satanasso, Prince of all Devils.

[*She suppresses a laugh.*]

BEELZEBUBB. You have made a promise, and you cannot keep it, so you call for help. I come, for I am always ready. Now tell me precisely what it is you want.

BENVENUTA. I have promised a coat to the little Child —

BEELZEBUBB. That will do. It were better not to speak the name. What sort of a coat do you wish?

BENVENUTA. May I have just what I like?

BEELZEBUBB. Certainly you may, my dear — if you are ready to pay for it.

BENVENUTA. I am ready. And I should like a little coat like the one on the second of the Magi in the Adoration by Bellini that is over the altar in our chapel at home — in the house of the Duke Loredano.

BEELZEBUBB. Let me understand exactly. The coat is to be like the coat on the second figure to the left from the center of the picture?

BENVENUTA. Yes — no, there's a Saint Joseph also at the back. He would be the third — from the Holy —

BEELZEBUBB. I pray you, keep the names of these people out of it.

BENVENUTA. These people!

[*Benvenuta's hand moves as if she were about to cross herself.*]

BEELZEBUBB. And let your hand fall. You were about to make — to make some sort of sign with it. These practices are very distasteful to me. I cannot help you — or even stay for an interview — if you persist in them.

BENVENUTA. I beg your forgiveness. I had no intention —

BEELZEBUBB. I believe that — it is merely a habit you have learned — but it is distasteful to me.

BENVENUTA. I will not offend you again.

BEELZEBUBB. Now to business. You wish of me a coat, a rich coat like that on the third figure from the center of the picture that is in your father's chapel at Venice. And the size —

BENVENUTA. To fit the little Child —

BEELZEBUBB [*interrupting sharply*]. I beg of you! I understand. The coat is of what color?

BENVENUTA. It is the coat of the second of the Magi —

[*He puts up his hand, and she checks herself.*]

It is of carmine silk damask with gold thread, and the inner vest is of white lawn. I wish it precisely like the picture, since you promise so much.

BEELZEBUBB. It shall be so. I will undertake to bring you the coat. And in exchange I ask only that you sign your name here.

[*He takes out a parchment contract, with a great red seal on it.*]

I regret that ink will not do. You must prick one of your fingers. I am very sorry, but there is no other way.

BENVENUTA. Prick my finger? Once?

BEELZEBUBB. Only once, to secure the drop of blood. I am sorry to ask it, but —

BENVENUTA. As though it never happened to me before!

[*She pricks her finger and squeezes out a drop of Blood. He whips out a quill pen, and deftly wets it with the blood.*]

BEELZEBUBB. You will sign here.

BENVENUTA. And what does it say? I should be loath to sign anything unworthy of my family, or of this noble convent —

BEELZEBUBB. There is nothing novel about it — the form is quite usual, and has been signed, I assure you, by many of the highest families in Venice. It

merely binds me at once to furnish you the rich coat, and you to give me your little flame of a soul — when I come for it. That is all.

BENVENUTA. Give me the pen.

[*She signs the contract. He passes his hand thrice across the pouch and then takes from it the coat, and lays it across her lap. He steps back and bows stiffly, folding the contract and smiling.*]

BEELZEBUBB. My dear young lady — my dear little sister.

[*He bows again, and vanishes; again the organ is heard, and Benvenuta is left, her face glowing in ecstasy, the carmine coat across her knees.*]

[*Curtain.*]

[SCENE III: *The Chapter Room. Night. The Abbess giving orders to Grimana, Rosalba, the Sister Sacristan and others, about the midnight office.*]

ABBESS. All are to be present. None are to be indulged. I beg you, so inform the sisters.

[*Rosalba goes out.*]

And the novices are all to be in their places. I know the hour is late for them, and many are young, but this is an exceptional night. Stay.— The novice Atalanta Badoer — I shall require her apart from the others. She will be needed with her lute.

GRIMANA. I will look to it, Reverend Mother.

[*She sets about to gather her embroidery.*]

ABBESS. Now in the matter of the relics and vestments?

SISTER SACRISTAN. The relics are all re-furbished and repacked in new cotton-wool, Reverend Mother.

ABBESS. And the vestments?

SISTER SACRISTAN. The vestments are all in order —

[*She is about to mention something about the vestments, but stops herself.*]

ABBESS. Go on.

SISTER SACRISTAN. I must report, as a matter of duty, Reverend Mother, that certain goods — a piece of fine lawn — cannot be found. It was laid out here to be used for the new surplice for His Eminence.

ABBESS. I do not like this. Tell me what you know of it.

SISTER SACRISTAN. This is all I know. Except that when I returned here, the door to the Sacristy Closet was open —

ABBESS. Who was here at the time?

SISTER SACRISTAN. Sister Benvenuta was left here. When I returned she was gone, and the closet was open, and the lawn —

GRIMANA [*interceding*]. I beg you, Reverend Mother —

ABBESS. Sister Grimana, I have given you your task. Be about it.

[*Grimana touches the buttons of her cape one by one, and then turns and goes out.*]

Sister, remember that the Sister Benvenuta comes of the noble house of the Loredani. Guard your tongue.

[*The Sister Sacristan stands gloomily biting her lips.*]

If she has removed the cloth to some other place, it does not matter. Remember who she is, and that she is after all a child in mind, in heart. We will speak no more of this.

SISTER SACRISTAN. No, Reverend Mother.

ABBESS. Send Sister Rosalba to me.

SISTER SACRISTAN. She is coming now, Reverend Mother.

[*Rosalba comes in and the Sister Sacristan goes out.*]

ABBESS. I wish to speak with Benvenuta, Sister.

ROSALBA. I will fetch her, Reverend Mother.

ABBESS. One moment. You have observed her of late?

ROSALBA. Yes, Mother.

ABBESS. She seems pale, and not so strong as she was. And her mind — but then she was always a simple child.

ROSALBA. Of course, I do not know the cause of her pallor. Perhaps a penance she is undergoing secretly.

[*The suggestion is half a question as are those of the Abbess as well.*]

She is still very young, Reverend Mother.

ABBESS. She has confided nothing to you, nor to Grimana?

ROSALBA. Not to me, Mother. Shall I call Sister Grimana?

ABBESS. No. Send Benvenuta to me.

And ask Grimana to send the novice Atalanta also — a little later.

[*Rosalba goes out. The Abbess goes over and examines the Sacristy Closet door, tries the lock, finds it fast, and returns to her chair. Benvenuta enters. She is more pale than before, and looks frailer, and her limp is more apparent, but her eyes are wide, and rove about the room, and her expression is of one who has found her happiness. The Abbess speaks to her kindly.*]

ABBESS. My child, I have called you to me because you have seemed so pale, and I fear you have burdened yourself beyond your strength.

BENVENUTA. No, Reverend Mother. I am not burdened.

ABBESS. You are not performing any secret penance?

BENVENUTA. None, Mother.

ABBESS. Answer me truly, Benvenuta. You have not been contemplating some penance, and so been filled with anxiety.

BENVENUTA. I look for no penance in this life, Reverend Mother, beyond such as may be imposed upon me.

ABBESS. Nothing beyond your strength will be imposed. If you have need of more sleep, I would be willing to relax for you, for a time.

BENVENUTA. I do not need it, Reverend Mother.

[*Atalanta enters, sees the Abbess, and stands waiting.*]

ABBESS. If you should find yourself overburdened, little Sister, come to me. That will do. Atalanta, one moment.

[*Atalanta steps forward. Benvenuta starts to go, but lingers.*]

I shall need your help with the lute tonight. I know you play it well. The best lute player among the lay sisters is ill. You can play from notes?

ATALANTA. If it be not too difficult, Reverend Mother.

ABBESS. It is simple. But I will have them give you the music, against the time when you will be needed.

[*The Abbess goes out toward the Chapel. Benvenuta comes down to Atalanta.*]

BENVENUTA. Atalanta, dear!

ATALANTA. Yes, Benvenuta.

BENVENUTA. There is something I must talk to you about. I have put it off because I have been deep in my own thoughts. You told me not so long ago that you could not find your call, that the world still beckoned you.

ATALANTA. Yes, it did. But I have been calmer since we spoke of it. There was a thing in my heart that had to be spoken out —

BENVENUTA. Yes.

ATALANTA. I spoke it out to you, and since then it has not troubled me.

BENVENUTA. It was about the vinedresser's baby in your father's garden?

ATALANTA. Yes.

BENVENUTA. You told me about it here — in this room, was it not?

ATALANTA. Yes. Surely it was here. How strangely you speak, Benvenuta. Have you forgotten? It was after that you asked me to get the gold thread, and the child's coat.

BENVENUTA. So I did. I had almost forgotten it.

ATALANTA. It was a great comfort to me to tell you, Sister — and to serve you. Why have you asked nothing more of me?

BENVENUTA. I have all the help I need, now.

[*A pause. Atalanta looks at Benvenuta wonderingly.*]

The vinedresser's baby — did you ever hold him in your arms?

ATALANTA. No.

BENVENUTA. Nor ever felt his lips soft and moist against your cheek, nor his fingers warm on your neck?

ATALANTA. No. I only saw the child, as I told you.

BENVENUTA. I remember now. You only saw him.

[*Another pause. Benvenuta is looking toward the Sacristy closet.*]

Atalanta, dear, do you know that we can only be happy by pleasing those we love most — that is what people live for, I think. And dear, remember this: the happiness you saw on the face of the vinedresser's wife was as torment beside the joy that is glowing in me.

[*Her eyes meet Atalanta's for a moment.*]

Don't, dear — don't think it too strange. Everything is strange, after all.

ATALANTA. Your face was like hers, then.

BENVENUTA. Please don't say that,

dear. It's — it's foolish — isn't it? But I told you once I was waiting for something — all my life waiting. And now — and now!

[*She touches Atalanta's head, lightly, and goes off upstairs toward her cell. Atalanta is left looking after her. Grimana comes in.*]

GRIMANA. Well, mistress. Prideful over not sitting with the novices this night, eh? The lute-playing comes in well at last, does it?

ATALANTA. Oh, Sister Grimana, I —

[*She stops, confused.*]

GRIMANA. What is it, child?

ATALANTA. It's Benvenuta. Have you seen her? Have you? —

GRIMANA. Yes, dear, I've seen. She's young. These times come to all of us, I suppose. But they pass. Calm, child. Count your buttons.

ATALANTA. I was frightened, Sister Grimana.

GRIMANA. Aye, you'll frighten the novices just so in your turn. But just the same, I wish she wouldn't —

[*The Abbess reënters, as a bell strikes from the chapel. Rosalba comes on from the left, with two or three sisters.*]

ABBESS. It is time. Let us all proceed to the chapel.

[*The Sister Sacristan carrying the lute and some music, enters from the chapel.*]

Are all the sisters assembled?

SISTER SACRISTAN. All save those who are here, and Sister Benvenuta.

ABBESS. Please you, Sister Grimana, go for Benvenuta.

[*Grimana goes up the stairs.*]

SISTER SACRISTAN. Here is the lute, Atalanta Badoer. The notes are clear, and the times you are to play them are written there.

ATALANTA. My hands tremble so. I'm afraid I shall fail in it.

ABBESS. Courage, child. I know it is the first time, but you will do well — I am sure you will do well. Come, let us take our places.

[*Grimana enters on the steps, in great trouble of mind. She carries in her hand the puppet of the Beelzebubb, twisted and shattered and singed with fire.*]

GRIMANA. Reverend Mother, forgive me. I have seen — I have seen —

[*She clasps and unclasps her hands, unable to speak.*]

ABBESS. What was it, Grimana?

GRIMANA. I scarcely know, Mother. Mary be my shield!

ABBESS. Speak, Sister.

GRIMANA. There was a great light through every crevice of the door of her cell. And music in the air — like harps and viols d'amour. And on the floor outside I found this — shattered and half burnt — this puppet. And from within, sounds —

ABBESS. Tell me all, Sister.

GRIMANA [*her fingers on the buttons of her cape*]. Sounds as of a mother and her babe, cooing and kissing and caressing each other.

ABBESS. Call the Father Confessor.

[*The Sister Sacristan goes out toward the chapel.*]

We must look to this. If her mind have broken under some penance —

ATALANTA. Let me go —

ABBESS. No. She was so pale —

[*The Sister Sacristan returns with the Abbe Filosi.*]

Reverend Father, the little sister of the house of Loredan —

[*Then, the upper corridor is filled with a growing light — the same radiant gold that streamed from the Sacristy closet. The sisters bless themselves and most of them fall on their knees. In the light Benvenuta appears walking erect, her lameness gone, and holding before her the Christ Child, in a wondrous robe of carmine silk damask. She laughs softly with the babe as she passes, and when she has passed off toward the chapel, whence the organ is again heard, the light fades.*]

ABBE FILOSI [*in a hushed voice*]. A miracle!

ABBESS. She is healed! A miracle of the Holy Child. Blessed Mother — thy Holy Child in our house.

[*Atalanta goes swiftly up the steps and off after Benvenuta.*]

ABBE FILOSI. Let there be a special service of thanksgiving.

ABBESS. Let all hearts be uplifted!

[*Atalanta returns, trailing her lute behind her, and sinks down at the head of the stairway, sobbing.*]

[*Curtain.*]

THREE TRAVELERS WATCH A SUNRISE

A Play

By Wallace Stevens

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THREE TRAVELERS WATCH A SUNRISE

A Play

By Wallace Stevens

[*The characters are three Chinese, two negroes and a girl.*

The scene represents a forest of heavy trees on a hilltop in eastern Pennsylvania. To the right is a road, obscured by bushes. It is about four o'clock of a morning in August, at the present time.

When the curtain rises, the stage is dark. The limb of a tree creaks. A negro carrying a lantern passes along the road. The sound is repeated. The negro comes through the bushes, raises his lantern and looks through the trees. Discerning a dark object among the branches, he shrinks back, crosses stage, and goes out through the wood to the left.

A second negro comes through the bushes to the right. He carries two large baskets, which he places on the ground just inside of the bushes. Enter three Chinese, one of whom carries a lantern. They pause on the road,]

Second Chinese. All you need,
To find poetry,
Is to look for it with a lantern. [*The Chinese laugh.*]

Third Chinese. I could find it without,
On an August night,
If I saw no more
Then the dew on the barns.

[*The Second Negro makes a sound to attract their attention. The three Chinese come through the bushes. The first is short, fat, quizzical, and of middle age. The second is of middle height, thin and turning gray; a man of sense and sympathy. The third is a young man, intent, detached. They wear European clothes.*]

Second Chinese [*glancing at the baskets*].
Dew is water to see,
Not water to drink:
We have forgotten water to drink.
Yet I am content
Just to see sunrise again.
I have not seen it
Since the day we left Pekin.
It filled my doorway,
Like whispering women.

First Chinese. And I have never seen it.
If we have no water,
Do find a melon for me
In the baskets.

[*The Second Negro, who has been opening the baskets, hands the First Chinese a melon.*]

First Chinese. Is there no spring?

[*The negro takes a water bottle of red porcelain from one of the baskets and places it near the Third Chinese.*]

Second Chinese [*to Third Chinese*].
Your porcelain water bottle.

[*One of the baskets contains costumes of silk, red, blue and green. During the following speeches, the Chinese put on these costumes, with the assistance of the negro, and seat themselves on the ground.*]

Third Chinese. This fetches its own water.

[*Takes the bottle and places it on the ground in the center of the stage.*]

I drink from it, dry as it is,
As you from maxims, [*To Second Chinese.*]
Or you from melons. [*To First Chinese.*]

First Chinese. Not as I, from melons.
Be sure of that.

SECOND CHINESE. Well, it is true of maxims.

[*He finds a book in the pocket of his costume, and reads from it.*]

"The court had known poverty and wretchedness; humanity had invaded its seclusion, with its suffering and its pity."

[*The limb of the tree creaks.*]

Yes: it is true of maxims,
Just as it is true of poets,
Or wise men, or nobles,
Or jade.

FIRST CHINESE. Drink from wise men? From jade?

Is there no spring?

[*Turning to the negro, who has taken a jug from one of the baskets.*]

Fill it and return.

[*The negro removes a large candle from one of the baskets and hands it to the First Chinese; then takes the jug and the lantern and enters the trees to the left. The First Chinese lights the candle and places it on the ground near the water bottle.*]

THIRD CHINESE. There is a seclusion of porcelain
That humanity never invades.

FIRST CHINESE [*with sarcasm*]. Porcelain!

THIRD CHINESE. It is like the seclusion of sunrise,
Before it shines on any house.

FIRST CHINESE. Pooh!

SECOND CHINESE. This candle is the sun;
This bottle is earth:
It is an illustration
Used by generations of hermits.
The point of difference from reality
Is this:
That, in this illustration,
The earth remains of one color —
It remains red,
It remains what it is.
But when the sun shines on the earth,
In reality
It does not shine on a thing that remains
What it was yesterday.
The sun rises
On whatever the earth happens to be.

THIRD CHINESE. And there are indeterminate moments
Before it rises,
Like this, [*With a backward gesture.*]
Before one can tell
What the bottle is going to be —
Porcelain, Venetian glass,
Egyptian . . .
Well, there are moments
When the candle, sputtering up,
Finds itself in seclusion, [*He raises the candle in the air.*]
And shines, perhaps, for the beauty of shining.
That is the seclusion of sunrise
Before it shines on any house. [*Replacing the candle.*]

FIRST CHINESE [*wagging his head*]. As abstract as porcelain.

SECOND CHINESE. Such seclusion knows beauty
As the court knew it.
The court woke
In its windless pavilions,
And gazed on chosen mornings,
As it gazed
On chosen porcelain.
What the court saw was always of the same color,
And well shaped,
And seen in a clear light. [*He points to the candle.*]
It never woke to see,
And never knew,
The flawed jars,
The weak colors,
The contorted glass.
It never knew
The poor lights. [*He opens his book significantly.*]
When the court knew beauty only,
And in seclusion,
It had neither love nor wisdom.
These came through poverty
And wretchedness,
Through suffering and pity. [*He pauses.*]
It is the invasion of humanity
That counts.

[*The limb of the tree creaks. The First Chinese turns, for a moment, in the direction of the sound.*]

FIRST CHINESE [*thoughtfully*]. The light of the most tranquil candle
Would shudder on a bloody salver.

SECOND CHINESE [*with a gesture of disregard*]. It is the invasion
That counts.
If it be supposed that we are three figures
Painted on porcelain

As we sit here,
That we are painted on this very bottle,
The hermit of the place,
Holding this candle to us,
Would wonder;
But if it be supposed
That we are painted as warriors,
The candle would tremble in his hands;
Or if it be supposed, for example,
That we are painted as three dead men,
He could not see the steadiest light,
For sorrow.
It would be true
If an emperor himself
Held the candle.
He would forget the porcelain
For the figures painted on it.

THIRD CHINESE [*shrugging his shoulders*]. Let the candle shine for the beauty of shining.

I dislike the invasion
And long for the windless pavilions.
And yet it may be true
That nothing is beautiful
Except with reference to ourselves,
Nor ugly,
Nor high, [*Pointing to the sky.*]
Nor low. [*Pointing to the candle.*]
No: not even sunrise.
Can you play of this [*Mockingly to First Chinese.*]
For us? [*He stands up.*]

FIRST CHINESE [*hesitatingly*]. I have a song
Called *Mistress and Maid.*
It is of no interest to hermits
Or emperors,
Yet it has a bearing;
For if we affect sunrise,
We affect all things.

THIRD CHINESE. It is a pity it is of women.
Sing it.

[*He takes an instrument from one of the baskets and hands it to the First Chinese, who sings the following song, accompanying himself, somewhat tunelessly, on the instrument. The Third Chinese takes various things out of the basket for tea. He arranges fruit. The First Chinese watches him while he plays. The Second Chinese gazes at the ground. The sky shows the first signs of morning.*]

FIRST CHINESE. The mistress says, in a harsh voice,

"He will be thinking in strange countries
Of the white stones near my door,
And I — I am tired of him."
She says sharply, to her maid,
"Sing to yourself no more."

Then the maid says, to herself,
"He will be thinking in strange countries
Of the white stones near her door;
But it is me he will see
At the window, as before.

"He will be thinking in strange countries
Of the green gown I wore.
He was saying good-by to her."
The maid drops her eyes and says to her mistress,
"I shall sing to myself no more."

THIRD CHINESE. That affects the white stones,
To be sure. [*They laugh.*]

FIRST CHINESE. And it affects the green gown.

SECOND CHINESE. Here comes our black man.

[*The Second Negro returns, somewhat agitated, with water but without his lantern. He hands the jug to the Third Chinese. The First Chinese from time to time strikes the instrument. The Third Chinese, who faces the left, peers in the direction from which the negro has come.*]

THIRD CHINESE. You have left your lantern behind you.
It shines, among the trees,
Like evening Venus in a cloud-top.

[*The Second Negro grins but makes no explanation. He seats himself behind the Chinese to the right.*]

FIRST CHINESE. Or like a ripe strawberry
Among its leaves. [*They laugh.*]
I heard to-night
That they are searching the hill
For an Italian.
He disappeared with his neighbor's daughter.

SECOND CHINESE [*confidently*]. I am sure you heard
The first eloping footfall,
And the drum

Of pursuing feet.
FIRST CHINESE [*amusedly*]. It was not an elopement.
The young gentleman was seen
To climb the hill,
In the manner of a tragedian
Who sweats.
Such things happen in the evening.
He was
Un misérable.
SECOND CHINESE. Reach the lady quickly.
[*The First Chinese strikes the instrument twice as a prelude to his narrative.*]
FIRST CHINESE. There are as many points of view
From which to regard her
As there are sides to a round bottle. [*Pointing to the water bottle.*]
She was represented to me
As beautiful.
[*They laugh. The First Chinese strikes the instrument, and looks at the Third Chinese, who yawns.*]
FIRST CHINESE [*reciting*]. She was as beautiful as a porcelain water bottle.
[*He strikes the instrument in an insinuating manner.*]
FIRST CHINESE. She was represented to me
As young.
Therefore my song should go
Of the color of blood.
[*He strikes the instrument. The limb of the tree creaks. The First Chinese notices it and puts his hand on the knee of the Second Chinese, who is seated between him and the Third Chinese, to call attention to the sound. They are all seated so that they do not face the spot from which the sound comes. A dark object, hanging to the limb of the tree, becomes a dim silhouette. The sky grows constantly brighter. No color is to be seen until the end of the play.*]
SECOND CHINESE [*to First Chinese*]. It is only a tree
Creaking in the night wind.
THIRD CHINESE [*shrugging his shoulders*]. There would be no creaking
In the windless pavilions.
FIRST CHINESE [*resuming*]. So far the lady of the present ballad
Would have been studied
By the hermit and his candle
With much philosophy;
And possibly the emperor would have cried,
"More light!"
But it is a way with ballads
That the more pleasing they are
The worse end they come to;
For here it was also represented
That the lady was poor —
The hermit's candle would have thrown
Alarming shadows,
And the emperor would have held
The porcelain in one hand . . .
She was represented as clinging
To that sweaty tragedian,
And weeping up the hill.
SECOND CHINESE [*with a grimace*]. It does not sound like an elopement.
FIRST CHINESE. It is a doleful ballad,
Fit for keyholes.
THIRD CHINESE. Shall we hear more?
SECOND CHINESE. Why not?
THIRD CHINESE. We came for isolation,
To rest in sunrise.
SECOND CHINESE [*raising his book slightly*]. But this will be a part of sunrise,
And can you tell how it will end? —
Venetian,
Egyptian,
Contorted glass . . .
[*He turns toward the light in the sky to the right, darkening the candle with his hands.*]
In the meantime, the candle shines, [*Indicating the sunrise.*]
As you say, [*To the Third Chinese.*]
For the beauty of shining.
FIRST CHINESE [*sympathetically*]. Oh! it will end badly.
The lady's father
Came clapping behind them
To the foot of the hill.
He came crying,
"Anna, Anna, Anna!" [*Imitating.*]
He was alone without her,
Just as the young gentleman
Was alone without her:
Three beggars, you see,
Begging for one another.
[*The First Negro, carrying two lanterns, approaches cautiously through the trees. At the sight of him, the Second Negro, seated near the Chinese, jumps to his feet.*

The Chinese get up in alarm. The Second Negro goes around the Chinese toward the First Negro. All see the body of a man hanging to the limb of the tree. They gather together, keeping their eyes fixed on it. The First Negro comes out of the trees and places the lanterns on the ground. He looks at the group and then at the body.]

FIRST CHINESE [*moved*]. The young gentleman of the ballad.

THIRD CHINESE [*slowly, approaching the body*]. And the end of the ballad.
Take away the bushes.

[*The negroes commence to pull away the bushes.*]

SECOND CHINESE. Death, the hermit,
Needs no candle
In his hermitage.

[*The Second Chinese snuffs out the candle. The First Chinese puts out the lanterns. As the bushes are pulled away, the figure of a girl, sitting half stupefied under the tree, suddenly becomes apparent to the Second Chinese and then to the Third Chinese. They step back. The negroes move to the left. When the First Chinese sees the girl, the instrument slips from his hands and falls noisily to the ground. The girl stirs.*]

SECOND CHINESE [*to the girl*]. Is that you, Anna?

[*The girl starts. She raises her head, looks around slowly, leaps to her feet and screams.*]

SECOND CHINESE [*gently*]. Is that you, Anna?

[*She turns quickly toward the body, looks at it fixedly and totters up the stage.*]

ANNA [*bitterly*]. Go.
Tell my father:
He is dead.

[*The Second and Third Chinese support her. The First Negro whispers to the First Chinese, then takes the lanterns and goes through the opening to the road, where he disappears in the direction of the valley.*]

FIRST CHINESE [*to Second Chinese*]. Bring up fresh water
From the spring.

[*The Second Negro takes the jug and enters the trees to the left. The girl comes gradually to herself. She looks at the Chinese and at the sky. She turns her back toward the body, shuddering, and does not look at it again.*]

ANNA. It will soon be sunrise.

SECOND CHINESE. One candle replaces
Another.

[*The First Chinese walks toward the bushes to the right. He stands by the roadside, as if to attract the attention of any one passing.*]

ANNA [*simply*]. When he was in his fields,
I worked in ours —
Wore purple to see;
And when I was in his garden
I wore gold ear-rings.
Last evening I met him on the road.
He asked me to walk with him
To the top of the hill.
I felt the evil,
But he wanted nothing.
He hanged himself in front of me.

[*She looks for support. The Second and Third Chinese help her toward the road.—At the roadside, the First Chinese takes the place of the Third Chinese. The girl and the two Chinese go through the bushes and disappear down the road. The stage is empty except for the Third Chinese. He walks slowly across the stage, pushing the instrument out of his way with his foot. It reverberates. He looks at the water bottle.*]

THIRD CHINESE. Of the color of blood . . .
Seclusion of porcelain . . .
Seclusion of sunrise . . .

[*He picks up the water bottle.*]

The candle of the sun
Will shine soon
On this hermit earth. [*Indicating the bottle.*]
It will shine soon
Upon the trees,
And find a new thing [*Indicating the body.*]
Painted on this porcelain, [*Indicating the trees.*]
But not on this. [*Indicating the bottle.*]

[*He places the bottle on the ground. A narrow cloud over the valley be-*

comes red. He turns toward it, then walks to the right. He finds the book of the Second Chinese lying on the ground, picks it up and turns over the leaves.]

Red is not only
The color of blood,
Or [*Indicating the body.*]
Of a man's eyes,
Or [*Pointedly.*]
Of a girl's.
And as the red of the sun
Is one thing to me
And one thing to another,
So it is the green of one tree [*Indicating.*]
And the green of another,
Which without it would all be black.
Sunrise is multiplied,
Like the earth on which it shines,
By the eyes that open on it,
Even dead eyes,
As red is multiplied by the leaves of trees.

[*Toward the end of this speech, the Second Negro comes from the trees to the left, without being seen. The Third Chinese, whose back is turned toward the negro, walks through the bushes to the right and disappears on the road. The negro looks around at the object on the stage. He sees the instrument, seats himself before it and strikes it several times, listening to the sound. One or two birds twitter. A voice, urging a horse, is heard at a distance. There is the crack of a whip. The negro stands up, walks to the right and remains at the side of the road.*

[*The Curtain Falls Slowly.*]

SHAM

A Social Satire

By Frank G. Tompkins

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THREE PEOPLE

CHARLES, *the Householder.*
CLARA, *his Wife.*
THE THIEF.

Originally produced by Sam Hume as the dedicatory piece of the new Arts & Crafts Theater, Detroit, and by Maurice Browne of the Chicago Art Theater.

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SHAM

A Social Satire

By Frank G. Tompkins

[Scene: *A darkened room. After a moment the door opens, admitting a streak of light. A man peers in cautiously. As soon as he is sure that the room is unoccupied, he steps inside and feels along the wall until he finds the switch which floods the room with light. He is dressed in impeccable taste — evidently a man of culture. From time to time he bites appreciatively on a ham sandwich as he looks about him, apparently viewing the room for the first time. Nothing pleases him until a vase over the mantel catches his eye. He picks it up, looks at the bottom, puts it down hard, and mutters, "Imitation." Other articles receive the same disdainful verdict. The whole room is beneath his notice. He starts to sit down before the fire and enjoy his sandwich. Suddenly he pauses to listen, looks about him hurriedly for some place to hide, thinks better of it, and takes his stand opposite the door, smiling pleasantly and expectantly. The door opens and a young woman enters with a man at her heels. As she sees the thief she stifles a scream and retreats, backing the man out behind her. The thief smiles and waits. Soon the door opens again, and the man enters with the woman clinging to him. They stand opposite the thief and stare at him, not sure what they ought to say or do.*]

Thief [*pleasantly*]. Good evening! [*Pause.*] Good evening, good evening. You surprised me. Can't say I expected you home so soon. Was the play an awful bore? [*Pause.*] We-e-ell, can't one of you speak. I CAN carry on a conversation alone, but the question-and-answer method is usually preferred. If one of you will ask me how I do, we might get a step farther.

Clara [*breathlessly*]. You — you — [*With growing conviction.*] You're a thief!

Thief. Exactly. And you, madame? The mistress of the house, I presume. Or are you another thief? The traditional one that it takes to catch the first?

Clara. This — this is OUR house. Charles, why don't you do something? Don't stand there like a — Make him go away! Tell him he mustn't take anything. [*Advancing toward the thief and speaking all in one sentence.*] What have you taken? Give it to me instantly. How dare you! Charles, take it away from him.

Charles [*apparently not afraid, a little amused, but uncertain what to do, finally adopting the bullying tone.*] I say, old man, you'd better clear out. We've come home. You know you can't — come now, give it up. Be sensible. I don't want to use force —

Thief. I don't want you to.

Charles. If you've got anything of ours — We aren't helpless, you know. [*He starts to draw something black and shiny from his overcoat pocket. It might be a pistol, but he does not reveal its shape.*]

Thief. Let's see those glasses. Give them here. [*Takes them from the uncertain Charles.*] Perhaps they're better than mine. Fine cases. [*Tries them.*] Humph! Window glass! Take them back. You're not armed, you know. I threw your revolver down the cold-air shaft. Never carry one myself — in business hours. Yours was in the bottom of your bureau drawer. Bad shape, those bureau drawers were in. Nice and neat on top; rat's nest below. Shows up your character in great shape, old man. Always tell your man by his bureau

drawers. Didn't it ever occur to you that a thief might drop in on you some night? What would he think of you?

CHARLES. I don't think —

THIEF. You should. I said to myself when I opened that drawer: "They put up a great surface, but they're shams. Probably streak that runs through everything they do." You ought to begin with real neatness. This other sort of thing is just a form of dishonesty.

CLARA. You! Talking to US about honesty — in our house!

THIEF. Just the place for honesty. Begin at home. Let's —

CLARA. Charles, I won't stand this? Grab hold of him. Search him. You hold him. I'll telephone.

THIEF. You can't.

CLARA. You've cut the wires.

THIEF. Didn't have to. Your telephone service has been cut off by the company. I found that out before I came. I suspect you neglected the bill. You ought not to, makes no end of trouble. Inconvenienced me this evening. Better get it put in right away.

CLARA. Charles, do I have to stand here and be insulted?

THIEF. Sit down. Won't you, please! This is your last ham-sandwich, so I can't offer you any, but there's plenty of beer in the cellar, if you care for it. I don't recommend it, but perhaps you're used to it.

CLARA [*almost crying*]. Charles, are you going to let him preach to us all night! I won't have it. Being lectured by a thief!

CHARLES. You can't stop a man's talking, my dear, especially this sort of man. Can't you see he's a born preacher? Old man, while advice is going round, let me tell you that you've missed your calling. Why don't you go in for reform? Ought to go big.

CLARA. Oh, Charles! Don't talk to him. You're a good deal bigger than he is.

THIEF. Maybe I'll jiu-jitsu him.

CLARA. He's insulting you now, Charles. Please try. I'll hold his feet.

THIEF. No doubt you would. But that wouldn't stop my talking. You'd be taking an unfair advantage, too; I couldn't kick a lady, could I? Besides, there are two of you. You leave it to Charles and me. Let's have fair play, at least.

CLARA. Fair play? I'd like to know —

THIEF. Ple-e-ase, don't screech! My head aches and your voice pierces so. Let's sit down quietly and discuss the situation like well-bred people, and when we've come to some understanding, I'll go.

CLARA. Yes, after you've taken everything in the house and criticized everything else you can't take, our manners and our morals.

CHARLES. But he isn't taking anything now, is he? Let the poor chap criticize, can't you? I don't suppose he often meets his — er — customers socially. He's just dying for a good old visit. Lonesome profession, isn't it, old man?

CLARA. If you WON'T do anything, I'll call the neighbors.

THIEF. No neighbors to call. Nearest one a block away, and he isn't at home. That comes of living in a fashionable suburb. Don't believe you can afford it, either. WON'T you sit down, madame? I can't till you do. Well, then I shall have to stand, and I've been on my feet all day. It's hardly considerate [*plaintively*]. I don't talk so well on my feet, either. It will take me much longer this way. [*Clara bounces into a chair, meaningfully.*] Thank you, that's better [*sighs with relief as he sinks into the easy chair*]. I knew I could appeal to your better nature. Have a cigarette? [*Charles accepts one from his beautiful case.*] And you, madame?

CLARA [*puts out her hand, but withdraws it quickly*]. Thank you, I don't care to smoke — with a thief.

THIEF. Right. Better not smoke, anyway. I'm so old-fashioned, I hate to see women smoke. None of the women in my family do it. Perhaps we're too conventional —

CLARA. I don't know that I care to be like the women of your family. I *will* have one, if you please. No doubt you get them from a man of taste.

THIEF. Your next-door neighbor. This is — was — his case. Exquisite taste. Seen this case often, I suppose? [*He eyes them closely.*] Great friends? Or perhaps you don't move in the same circles. [*Clara glares at him.*] Pardon

me. Tactless of me, but how could I guess? Well, here's your chance to get acquainted with his cigarettes. Will you have one now?

CLARA. I don't receive stolen goods.

THIEF. That's a little hard on Charles, isn't it? He seems to be enjoying his.

CHARLES. Bully cigarette. Hempsted's a connoisseur. Truth is — we don't know the Hempsteds. They've never called.

THIEF. That's right, Charles. Tell the truth and shame [*with a jerk of his head toward Clara*] — you know who.

CLARA. Charles, there isn't any reason, I'm sure —

THIEF. Quietly, please. Remember my head. I'm sorry, but I must decline to discuss your social prospects with you, and also your neighbors' shortcomings, much as we should all enjoy it. There isn't time for that. Let's get down to business. The question we've got to decide and decide very quickly is, What would you like to have me take?

CLARA [*aghast*]. What would we — what would we like to have you take? Why — why — you can't take anything now; we're here. Of all the nerve! What would we like —

THIEF. It gains by repetition, doesn't it?

CHARLES. You've got me, old man. You'll have to come again. I may be slow, but I don't for the moment see the necessity for your taking anything.

THIEF. I was afraid of this. I'll have to begin farther back. Look here now, just suppose I go away and don't take anything [*with an air of triumph*]. How would you like that?

CHARLES. Suits me to a "T." How about you, my dear? Think you can be firm and bear up under it?

THIEF. Don't be sarcastic. You're too big. Only women and little men should be sarcastic. Besides, it isn't fair to me, when I'm trying to help you. Here am I, trying to get you out of a mighty ticklish situation, and you go and get funny. It isn't right.

CHARLES. Beg pardon, old man. Try us in words of one syllable. You see this is a new situation for us. But we're anxious to learn.

THIEF. Listen, then. See if you can follow this. Now there's nothing in your house that I want; nothing that I could for a moment contemplate keeping without a good deal of pain to myself.

CLARA. We're trying to spare you. But if you care to know, we had the advice of Elsie de Wolfe.

THIEF [*wonderingly*]. Elsie de Wolfe? Elsie, how could you! Now, if you had asked me to guess, I should have said — the Pullman Company. I shudder to think of owning any of this bric-a-brac myself. But it must be done. Here am I offering to burden myself with something I don't want, wouldn't keep for worlds, and couldn't sell. [*Growing a little oratorical.*] Why do I do this?

CHARLES. Yes, why do you?

CLARA. Hush, Charles; it's a rhetorical question; he wants to answer it himself.

THIEF. I do it to accommodate you. Must I be even plainer? Imagine that I go away, refusing to take anything in spite of your protests. Imagine it's tomorrow. The police and the reporters have caught wind of the story. Something has been taken from every house in Sargent Road — except one. The nature of the articles shows that the thief is a man of rare discrimination. To be quite frank — a connoisseur.

CLARA. A connoisseur of what? Humph!

THIEF. And a connoisseur of such judgment that to have him pass your Rubens by is to cast doubt upon its authenticity. I do not exaggerate. Let me tell you that from the Hempsteds — [*Clara leans forward, all interest.*] — but that would take too long. [*She leans back.*] The public immediately asks, Why did the thief take nothing from 2819 Sargent Road? The answer is too obvious: There is nothing worth taking at 2819 Sargent Road.

CHARLES [*comprehendingly*]. Um-hu-m!

THIEF. The public laughs. Worse still, the neighbors laugh. What becomes of social pretensions after that? It's a serious thing, laughter is. It puts anybody's case out of court. And it's a serious thing to have a thief pass you by. People have been socially marooned for less than that. Have I made myself clear? Are you ready for the question? What would you like to have me take?

CHARLES. Now, old man, I say that's neat. Sure you aren't a lawyer?

THIEF. I have studied the law — but not from that side.

CLARA. It's all bosh. Why couldn't we claim we'd lost something very valuable, something we'd never had?

THIEF [*solemnly*]. That's the most shameless proposal I've ever heard. Yes, you could *lie* about it. I can't conceal from you what I think of your moral standards.

CHARLES. I can't imagine you concealing anything unpleasant.

CLARA. It's no worse than —

THIEF. Your moral sense is blunted. But I can't attend to that now. Think of this: Suppose, as I said, I should take nothing and you should publish that bare-faced lie, and then I should get caught. Would I shield you? Never. Or suppose I shouldn't get caught. Has no one entered your house since you have been here? Doesn't your maid know what you have? Can you trust her not to talk? No, no, it isn't worth the risk. It isn't even common sense, to say nothing of the moral aspects of the case. Why do people never stop to think of the practical advantages of having things stolen! Endless possibilities! Why, a woman loses a $5 brooch and it's immediately worth $15. The longer it stays lost, the more diamonds it had in it, until she prays God every night that it won't be found. Look at the advertising she gets out of it. And does she learn anything from it? Never. Let a harmless thief appear in her room and she yells like a hyena instead of saying to him, like a sensible woman: "Hands up; I've got you right where I want you; you take those imitation pearls off my dresser and get to hell out of here. If I ever see you or those pearls around here again, I'll hand you over to the police." That's what she ought to say. It's the chance of her life. But unless she's an actress, she misses it absolutely. A thief doesn't expect gratitude, but it seems to me he might at least expect understanding and intelligent coöperation. Here are you facing disgrace, and here am I willing to save you. And what do I get? Sarcasm, cheap sarcasm!

CHARLES. I beg your pardon, old man. I'm truly sorry. You're just too advanced for us. Clara, there's an idea in it. What do you think?

CLARA. It has its possibilities. Now if he'll let me choose — Isn't there a joker in it somewhere? Let me think. We might let you have something. What do you want?

THIEF [*indignantly*]. What do I want? I — don't want — anything. Can't you see that? The question is, What do you want me to have? And please be a little considerate. Don't ask me to take the pianola or the ice-box. Can't you make up your minds? Let me help you. Haven't you got some old wedding gifts? Everybody has. Regular white elephants, yet you don't dare get rid of them for fear the donors will come to see you and miss them. A discriminating thief is a godsend. All you have to do is write: "Dear Maude and Fred: Last night our house was broken into, and of course the first thing that was taken was that lovely Roycroft chair you gave us." Or choose what you like. Here's opportunity knocking at your door. Make it something ugly as you please, but something genuine. I hate sham.

CLARA. Charles, it's our chance. There's that lovely, hand-carved —

THIEF. Stop! I saw it [*shuddering*]. It has the marks of the machine all over it. Not that. I can't take that.

CLARA. Beggars shouldn't be —

THIEF. Where's my coat? That settles it.

CLARA. Oh, don't go! I didn't mean it. Honestly I didn't. It just slipped out. You mustn't leave us like this —

THIEF. I don't have to put up with such —

CLARA. Oh, please stay, and take something! Haven't we anything you want? Charles, hold him; don't let him go. No, that won't do any good. Talk to him —

CHARLES. Don't be so sensitive, old man. She didn't mean it. You know how those old sayings slip out — just say themselves. She only called you a little beggar anyway. You ought to hear what she calls me sometimes.

THIEF. I don't want to. I'm not her husband. And I don't believe she does it in the same way, either. But I'm not going to be mean about this. I'll give you another chance. Trot out your curios.

CHARLES. How about this? Old luster

set of Clara's grandmother's. I'm no judge of such things myself, but if you could use it, take it. Granddad gave it to her when they were sweethearts, didn't he, Clara?

THIEF. That! Old luster? That jug won't be four years old its next birthday. Don't lay such things to your grandmother. Have some respect for the dead. If you gave more than $3.98 for it, they saw you coming.

CLARA. You don't know anything about it. You're just trying to humiliate us because you know you have the upper hand.

THIEF. All right. Go ahead. Take your own risks.

CLARA. There's this Sheffield tray?

THIEF. No.

CHARLES. Do you like Wedgewood?

THIEF. Yes, where is it? [*Looks at it.*] No.

CLARA. This darling hawthorne vase —

THIEF. Please take it away. It isn't hawthorne.

CHARLES. I suppose Cloisonné —

THIEF. If they were any of them what you call them. But they aren't.

CHARLES. Well, if you'd consider burnt wood. That's a genuine burn.

THIEF. Nothing short of cremation would do it justice. Of course I've got to take one of them, if they're all you've got. But honestly, there isn't one genuine thing in this house, except Charles — and — and the ham sandwich.

CLARA [*takes miniature from cabinet*]. I wonder if you would treasure this as I do. It's very dear to me. It's grandmother —

THIEF [*suspiciously*]. Grandmother again?

CLARA. As a little girl. Painted on ivory. See that quaint old coral necklace. And those adorable yellow curls. And the pink circle comb. Would you like it?

THIEF. Trying to appeal to my sympathy. I've a good notion to take it to punish you. I wonder if it IS your grandmother. There isn't the slightest family resemblance. Look here! — it is! —it's a copy of the Selby miniature! Woman, do you know who that IS? It's Harriet Beecher Stowe at twelve. What have you done with my overcoat?

CHARLES. I give up. Here it is. Clara, that was too bad.

CLARA. I wanted to see if he'd know.

CHARLES. There's no use trying to save us after this. We'll just have to bear the disgrace.

THIEF. Charles, you're a trump! I'll even take that old daub for YOU. Give it to me.

CHARLES. Wait a minute. You won't have to. Say, Clara, where is that old picture of Cousin Paul? It's just as bad as it pretends to be, if genuineness is all you want.

THIEF [*suspiciously*]. Who is Cousin Paul? Don't try to ring in Daniel Webster on me.

CHARLES. Cousin of mine. Lives on a farm near Madison, Wisconsin.

THIEF. You don't claim the picture is by Sargent or Whistler?

CLARA. It couldn't be —

THIEF [*ignoring her pointedly*]. Do you, Charles?

CHARLES. Certainly not. It's a water color of the purest water, and almost a speaking likeness.

THIEF. I'll take Cousin Paul. Probably he has human interest.

CHARLES. That's the last thing I should have thought of in connection with Cousin Paul.

THIEF. Bring him, but wrapped, please. My courage might fail me if I saw him face to face.

CHARLES [*leaving room for picture*]. Mine always does.

THIEF. While Charles is wrapping up the picture, I want to know how you got back so early. Your maid said you were going to the Garrick.

CLARA. We told her so. But we went to the moving pictures.

THIEF. You ought not to go to the movies. It will destroy your literary taste and weaken your minds.

CLARA. I don't care for them myself, but Charles won't see anything else.

THIEF. You ought to make him. Men only go to the theater anyway because their wives take them. They'd rather stay at home or play billiards. You have a chance right there. Charles will go where you take him. By and by he will begin to like it. Now to-night there was a Granville Barker show at the Garrick, and you went to the movies to

see a woman whose idea of cuteness is to act as if she had a case of arrested mental development.

CHARLES [*entering, doing up picture*]. Silly old films, anyway. But Clara *will* go. Goes afternoons when I'm not here, and then drags me off again in the evening. Here's your picture, as soon as I get it tied up. Can't tell you how grateful we are. Shall we make it unanimous, Clara?

CLARA. I haven't the vote, you know. Clumsy! give me the picture.

THIEF. Don't try to thank me. If you'll give up this shamming I'll feel repaid for my time and trouble [*looking at watch*]. By Jove! it's far too much time. I must make tracks this minute. I'll feel repaid if you'll take my advice about the theater for one thing, and — why don't you bundle all this imitation junk together and sell it and get one genuine good thing?

[*Clara leaves, apparently for more string.*]

CHARLES. Who'd buy them?

THIEF. There must be other people in the world with taste as infallibly bad as yours.

CHARLES. Call that honest?

THIEF. Certainly. I'm not telling you to sell them as relics. You couldn't in the first place, except to a home for the aged and indigent blind. But I know a man who needs them. They'd rejoice his heart. They'd be things of beauty to him. I wish I could help you pick out something with your money. But I don't dare risk seeing you again.

CLARA [*reëntering, with the picture tied*]. Why not? There's honor among thieves.

THIEF. There *is*. If you were thieves, I'd know just how far to trust you. Now, I'd be willing to trust Charles as man to man. Gentleman's agreement. But [*looking at Clara*] I don't know —

CHARLES. Clara is just as honest as we are — with her own class. But your profession puts you outside the pale with her; you're her natural enemy. You haven't any rights. But you've been a liberal education for us both.

THIEF. I've been liberal. You meet me — listen! — there are footsteps on the porch. I — I've waited too long. Here I've stood talking —

CHARLES. Well, stop it now, can't you? I don't see how you've ever got anywhere. Hide!

THIEF. No, it can't be done. If you'll play fair, I'm safe enough here in this room, safer than anywhere else. Pretend I'm a friend of yours. You will? Gentleman's agreement? [*He shakes hands with Charles.*]

CHARLES. Gentleman's agreement. My word of honor.

CLARA [*offers her hand as Charles starts for the door*]. Gentleman's agreement, but only in this. I haven't forgiven you for what you've said. If I ever get you in a tight place — look out.

THIEF [*taking her hand*]. Don't tell more than one necessary lie. It's so easy to get started in that sort of thing. Stick to it that I'm a friend of the family and that I've been spending the evening. God knows I have!

CLARA. I'll try to stick to that. But can't I improvise a little? It's such fun!

THIEF. Not a bit. Not one little white lie.

CHARLES [*entering with a young man behind him*]. It's a man from the *News*. He says he was out here on another story and he's got a big scoop. There's been some artistic burglary in the neighborhood and he's run onto it. I told him we hadn't lost anything and that we don't want to get into the papers; but he wants us to answer a few questions.

REPORTER. Please do. I need some stuff about the neighborhood.

CLARA. I don't know, Charles, but that it's our duty. [*She smiles wickedly at the thief.*] Something we say may help catch the thieves. Perhaps we owe it to law and order.

REPORTER. That's right. Would you object if I used your name?

[*Charles and the thief motion to Clara to keep still, but throughout the rest of the conversation she disregards their frantic signals, and sails serenely on.*]

CLARA. I don't know that we should mind if you mention us nicely. Will the Hempsteds be in? I shan't mind it, if they don't.

REPORTER. Good for you. Now, have you —

CLARA. We *have* missed something. We haven't had time to look thoroughly, but we do know that one of our pictures is gone.

[*The men are motioning to her, but she goes on sweetly.*]

REPORTER. A-a-ah! Valuable picture. He hasn't taken anything that wasn't best of its class. Remarkable chap. Must be the same one that rifled the Pierpont collection of illuminated manuscripts. Culled the finest pieces without a mistake.

THIEF [*interested*]. He made one big mistake. He — [*stops short*].

REPORTER. Know the Pierponts?

THIEF. Er — ye-es. I've been in their house. [*Retires from the conversation. Clara smiles.*]

REPORTER. Well, believe me, if he's taken anything, your reputation as collectors is made. Picture, eh? Old master, I suppose?

CLARA. A family portrait. We treasured it for that. Associations, you know.

REPORTER. Must have been valuable, all right. Depend on him to know. He doesn't run away with any junk. Who was the artist?

CLARA. We don't know — definitely.

REPORTER. Never heard it attributed to anybody?

CLARA. We don't care to make any point of such things. But there have been people who have thought — it was not — a — a Gilbert Stuart.

CHARLES. Clara!

CLARA. I don't know much about such things myself. But our friend [*nods toward the thief*], Mr. — Mr. Hibbard — who has some reputation as a collector, has always said that it was — not. In spite of that fact, he had offered to take it off our hands.

CHARLES. Clara, you're going too far —

REPORTER. She's quite right. You're wrong, Mr. Hibbard. You may be good, but this fellow KNOWS. Too bad you didn't take it while the taking was good. This fellow never sells. Of course he can't exhibit. Just loves beautiful things. No, sir, it was real.

THIEF [*between his teeth*]. It wasn't. Of all the —

CLARA [*smiling*]. You take your beating so ungracefully, Mr. Hibbard. The case, you see, is all against you.

THIEF. Be careful. The picture may be found at any minute. Don't go too far.

CLARA. I hardly think it will be found unless the thief is caught. And I have such perfect confidence in his good sense that I don't expect that.

REPORTER. Lots of time for a getaway. When was he here?

CLARA. He was gone when we came from the theater. But we must almost have caught him. Some of our finest things were gathered together here on the table ready for his flight. How he must have hated to leave them, all the miniatures and the cloisonné. I almost feel sorry for him.

CHARLES. I do.

CLARA. You see, we went to the Garrick for the Granville Barker show. Mr. Hibbard took us [*she smiles sweetly at him*]. I'm devoted to the best in drama and I always insist that Charles and Mr. Hibbard shall take me only to the finest things. And now we come home to find our — you're sure it was a Gilbert Stuart? — gone.

THIEF. I've got to be getting out of here! Can't stay a minute longer! Charles, I wish you luck in that reform we were speaking of, but I haven't much hope [*looking at Clara*]. There is such a thing as total depravity. Oh, here! [*taking package from under his arm*]. What am I thinking of? I was running away with your package [*hands it to Clara*].

CLARA [*refusing it*]. Oh, but it's yours, Mr. Hibbard. I couldn't think of taking it. Really, you must keep it to remember us by. Put it among your art treasures at home, next to your lovely illuminated manuscripts, and whenever you look at it remember us and this delightful evening, from which we are all taking away so much. You must keep it — that's part of the bargain, isn't it? And now are we even?

THIEF. Even? Far from it. I yield you your woman's right to the last word, and I admit it's the best [*stoops and kisses her hand*]. Good-night, Clara. [*To the reporter.*] May I give you a lift back to town?

REPORTER. Thanks. As far as the

Hempsteds' corner. Good-night. Thank you for this much help. [*Exeunt.*]

CHARLES. Thank goodness, they've gone. What relief! That pace is too rapid for me. You had me running round in circles. But he's got the picture, and we're safe at last. But don't you think, Clara, you took some awful risks. You goaded him pretty far.

CLARA. I had to. Did you hear him call me Clara?

CHARLES [*chuckling*]. He doesn't know our name. But he wasn't a bad fellow, was he? I couldn't help liking him in spite of his impudence.

CLARA. You showed it. You took sides with him against me all the time the reporter was here. But, you know, he was right about our house. It's all wrong. The Hempsteds would see it in a minute. I believe I'll clear out this cabinet and have this room done over in mahogany.

CHARLES. Too expensive this winter.

CLARA. Birch will do just as well — nobody knows the difference. Listen! is he coming back?

REPORTER [*in the doorway*]. Excuse me — listen. Mr. Hibbard says you've given him the wrong package. He says you need this to go with the picture of your grandmother. And he says, sir, that you need to get wise to your own family. He's waiting for me. Good-night! [*Exit.*]

CHARLES [*angrily*]. Get wise to my own family? He may know all about art [*undoing the picture*], but I guess I know my own relatives. [*Holds up picture so that audience can see it, but he can't.*] And if that isn't a picture of my own cousin Paul, I'll eat — [*sees Clara laughing*]. What the devil! [*Looks at picture, which represents George Washington.*] Clara! you did that! [*laughs uproariously*]. You little cheat!

[*Curtain.*]

THE MEDICINE SHOW

A Comedy

By Stuart Walker

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The Medicine Show was first produced by Stuart Walker's Portmanteau Theatre, with the following cast:

Lut'er.....*Williard Webster.*
Giz.....*Edgar Stehli.*
Dr. Stev'n Vandexter.....*Lew Medbury.*

CHARACTERS

Lut'er.
Giz.
Dr. Stev'n Vandexter.

The Scene *is on the south bank of the Ohio River. An old soap box, a log and a large stone are visible. The river is supposed to flow between the stage and the audience. In the background, at the top of the "grade," is the village of Rock Springs.*

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THE MEDICINE SHOW

A Comedy

By Stuart Walker

[Prologue: *This is only a quarter of a play. Its faults are many. Come, glory in them with us.*

You are a little boy once more lying on your rounded belly on the cool, damp sands beside the beautiful river. You are still young enough to see the wonder that everywhere touches the world; and men are in the world — all sorts of men. But you can still look upon them with the shining eyes of brotherhood. You can still feel the mystery that is true understanding. Everywhere about you men and things are reaching for the infinite, each in his own way, be it big or little, be it the moon or a medicine show; and you yourself are not yet decided whether to reach for the stars or go a-fishing. Brother!

Lut'er enters or rather oozes in.

He is a tall, expressionless, uncoördinated person who might be called filthy were it not for the fact that the dirt on his skin and on his clothes seems an inherent part of him. He has a wan smile that — what there is of it — is not displeasing. Strangely enough, his face is always smooth-shaven. He carries a fishing pole made from a tree twig and equipped with a thread knotted frequently and a bent pin for hook.

Lut'er looks about and his eyes light on the stone. He attempts to move it with his bare foot to the water's edge, but it is too heavy for him. Next he looks at the log, raises his foot to move it, then abandons the attempt because his eyes rest on the lighter soap box. This he puts in position, never deigning to touch it with his hands. Then he sits calmly and drawing a fishing worm from the pocket of his shirt fastens it on the pin-hook and casts his line into the water. Thereafter he takes no apparent interest in fishing.

After a moment Giz enters.

Giz is somewhat dirtier than Lut'er but the dirt is less assimilated and consequently less to be condoned. Besides he is fuzzy with a beard of long standing. He may have been shaved some Saturdays ago — but quite ago.

Giz doesn't speak to Lut'er and Lut'er doesn't speak to Giz, but Lut'er suggests life by continued chewing and he acknowledges the proximity of Giz by spitting and wiping his lips with his hand. Giz having tried the log and the rock finally chooses the rock and acknowledges Lut'er's salivary greeting by spitting also; but he wipes his mouth on his sleeve.

After a moment he reaches forward with his bare foot and touches the water.]

Giz. 'Tis warm as fresh milk.

[*Lut'er, not to be wholly unresponsive, spits. A fresh silence falls upon them.*]

Giz. 'S Hattie Brown came in?

[*Lut'er spits and almost shakes his head negatively.*]

She's a mighty good little steam-boat.

Lut'er. She's water-logged.

Giz. She ain't water-logged.

Lut'er. She is.

Giz. She ain't.

Lut'er. She is.

Giz. She ain't.

[*The argument dies of malnutrition. After a moment of silence Giz speaks.*]

Giz. 'S river raisin'?

Lut'er. Nup!

[*Silence.*]

Giz. Fallin'?

Lut'er. Nup!

Giz. Standin' still?

Lut'er. Uh!

[*The conversation might continue if Giz did not catch a mosquito on his leg.*]

GIZ. Gosh! A galler-nipper at noonday!

[*Lut'er scratches back of his ear warily.*]

GIZ. An' look at the whelp!

[*Giz scratches actively, examines the wound and anoints it with tobacco juice.*

The Play would be ended at this moment for lack of varied action if Dr. Stev'n Vandexter did not enter.

He is an eager, healthy-looking man with a whitish beard that long washing in Ohio River water has turned yellowish. He wears spectacles and his clothes and general appearance are somewhat an improvement upon Lut'er and Giz. Furthermore he wears what were shoes and both supports of his suspenders are fairly intact. He is whittling a piece of white pine with a large jack-knife.

Seeing Lut'er and Giz he draws the log between them and sits.

After a moment in which three cuds are audibly chewed, Dr. Stev'n speaks.]

DOCTOR. What gits me is how they done it.

[*For the first time Lut'er turns his head as admission that some one is there. Giz looks up with a dawn of interest under his beard. Silence.*]

DOCTOR. I traded a two-pound catfish for a box of that salve: an' I don't see how they done it.

[*Lut'er having turned his head keeps it turned. Evidently Dr. Stev'n always has something of interest to say.*]

GIZ. Kickapoo?

DOCTOR. Ye'. Kickapoo Indian Salve. I don't think no Indian never seen it.

[*He looks at Giz for acquiescence.*]

GIZ. Y'ain't never sure about nothin' these days.

[*Dr. Stev'n looks at Lut'er for acquiescence also, and Lut'er approving turns his head forward and spits assent.*]

DOCTOR. I smelled it an' it smelled like ker'sene. I biled it an' it biled over an' burnt up like ker'sene. . . . I don't think it was nothin' but ker'sene an' lard.

GIZ. Reckon 't wuz common ker'sene?

DOCTOR. I don't know whether 't wuz common ker'sene but I know 't wuz ker'sene. . . . An' I bet ker'sene'll cure heaps o' troubles if yer use it right.

GIZ. That air doctor said the salve ud cure most anything.

LUT'ER [*as though a voice from the grave, long forgotten*]. Which doctor?

GIZ. The man doctor — him with the p'inted musstash.

LUT'ER. I seen him take a egg outer Jimmie Weldon's ear — an' Jimmie swore he didn't have no hen in his head.

DOCTOR. But the lady doctor said it warn't so good — effie-cacious she called it — withouten you took two bottles o' the buildin' up medicine, a box o' the liver pills an' a bottle o' the hair fluid.

GIZ. She knowed a lot. She told me just how I felt an' she said she hated to trouble me but I had a internal ailment. An' she said I needed all their medicine jus' like the Indians used it. But I told her I didn't have no money so she said maybe the box o' liver pills would do if I'd bring 'em some corn for their supper.

DOCTOR. Y' got the liver pills?

GIZ. Uh-huh.

LUT'R. Took any?

GIZ. Nup, I'm savin' 'em.

LUT'ER. What fur?

GIZ. Till I'm feelin' sicker'n I am now.

DOCTOR. Where are they?

GIZ. In m' pocket.

[*They chew in silence for a minute.*]

DOCTOR. Yes, sir! It smelled like ker'sene ter me — and ker'sene 't wuz. . . . Ker'sene'll cure heaps o' things if you use it right.

[*He punctuates his talk with covert glances at Giz. His thoughts are on the pills.*]

DOCTOR. Which pocket yer pills in, Giz?

GIZ [*discouragingly*]. M' hip pocket.

[*Again they chew.*]

DOCTOR. The Family Medicine Book where I learned ter be a doctor said camphor an' ker'sene an' lard rubbed on flannel an' put on the chest 'ud cure tizic, maybe. [*He looks at Giz.*]

DOCTOR. An' what ud cure tizic ought ter cure anything, I think. . . . I'd 'a' cured m' second wife if the winder hadn't blowed out an' she got kivered with snow. After that she jus' wheezed until she couldn't wheeze no longer. An' so when

I went courtin' m' third wife, I took a stitch in time an' told her about the camphor an' ker'sene an' lard. [*Ruefully.*] She's a tur'ble healthy woman. [*His feelings and his curiosity having overcome his tact, he blurts out.*] Giz, why'n th' hell don't yer show us yer pills!

GIZ. Well — if yer wanner see 'em — here they air.

[*He takes the dirty, mashed box out of his hip pocket and hands it to the Doctor. The Doctor opens the box and smells the pills.*]

DOCTOR. Ker'sene. . . . Smell 'em, Lut'er. [*He holds the box close to Luter's nose.*]

LUT'ER [*with the least possible expenditure of energy*]. Uh!

DOCTOR. Ker'sene! . . . Well, I guess it's good for the liver, too. . . . Gimme one, Giz?

GIZ. I ain't got so many I can be givin' 'em ter everybody.

DOCTOR. Jus' one, Giz.

GIZ. She said I ought ter take 'em all fer a cure.

LUT'ER. What yer got, Giz? [*Calling a man by name is a great effort for Lut'er.*]

GIZ. Mostly a tired feelin' an' sometimes a crick in th' back. [*Lut'er displays a sympathy undreamed of.*]

LUT'ER. Gimme one, Giz.

GIZ. Gosh! You want th' whole box, don't yer?

LUT'ER. Keep yer pills. [*He spits.*]

DOCTOR. What's ailin' *you*, Lut'r?

LUT'ER. Oh, a tired feelin' [*There is a long moment of suspended animation, but the Doctor knows that the mills of the gods grind slowly — and he waits for Lut'er to continue.*] An' a crick in m' back.

DOCTOR. I'll cure yer, Lut'er. [*Lut'er just looks.*] If that Kickapoo doctor with the p'inted muss-tash kin cure yer, I guess I can.

GIZ [*who has been thinking pretty hard*]. Got any terbaccer, Doc?

DOCTOR. Yep.

GIZ. Well, here's a pill fer a chaw. [*He and the Doctor rise.*]

[*Giz takes a pill out of the box and the Doctor takes his tobacco from his pocket, reaches out his hand for the pill and holds out the tobacco, placing his thumb definitely on the plug so that Giz can bite off so much and no more. Giz bites and the Doctor takes over the pill. Lut'er not to be outdone takes a battered plug of tobacco from his pocket and bites off an unlimited "chaw." The Doctor takes his knife from his pocket and cuts the pill, smelling it.*]

DOCTOR. Ker'sene! [*He tastes it.*] Ker'sene! Now I been thinkin' things over, Lut'er and Giz . . . [*He tastes the pill again.*] Ker'sene, sure! [*He sits down on the log once more, spits carefully and crosses his legs.*] I got a business proposition to make. [*Silence. Lut'er spits and crosses his legs, and Giz just spits.*]

DOCTOR. There ain't enough home industry here in Rock Springs. We got a canning fact'ry and a stea'mill; but here comes a medicine show from Ioway — a Kickapoo Indian Medicine Show from Ioway! Now — what we need in Rock Springs is a medicine show! [*He waits for the effect upon his audience.*]

LUT'ER [*after a pause*]. How yer goin' ter git it?

DOCTOR. Well, here's my proposition. Ain't we got as much horse sense as them Ioway Indians?

LUT'ER. A damn sight more. [*That is the evident answer to the Doctor, but Lut'er develops a further idea.*] We got the country from the Indians.

GIZ [*after a moment of accumulating admiration*]. By Golly, Lut'er, yer right.

DOCTOR. Now, I got some medicine science. I'd 'a' cured my second wife if it hadn't been for that busted winder.

GIZ. Yeh, but what come o' yer first wife?

DOCTOR. I could 'a' cured her, too, only I hadn't found the Family Medicine Book then.

LUT'ER. Well, what I wanter know is — what's yer proposition . . . I'm in a hurry. . . . Here comes the Hattie Brown.

[*The Hattie Brown and the whistle of the steam-mill indicate noon. Lut'er takes in the line — removes the fishing worm and puts it in his pocket.*]

DOCTOR. Well, I'll make the salve an'

do the talkin'; Giz'll sort o' whoop things up a bit and Lut'er'll git cured.

LUT'ER. What'll I get cured of?

DOCTOR. Oh, lumbago an' tired feelin' . . . crick in the back and tizic.

LUT'ER. But who'll take a egg out o' somebody's ear?

DOCTOR. Giz'll learn that.

LUT'ER [*with a wan smile that memory illuminates.*] An' who'll play the pianny?

DOCTOR. Besteena, my daughter.

LUT'ER. Where we goin'?

DOCTOR. We'll go ter Lavanny first.

LUT'ER. How'll we git there?

DOCTOR. Walk — unless somebody give us a tote.

GIZ. We kin go in my John-boat.

LUT'ER. Who'll row? [*There is fear in his voice.*]

GIZ. We'll take turns. [*Lut'er looks with terror upon Giz.*]

LUT'ER. How fur is it?

DOCTOR. Three an' a half mile. . . . Will you go, Lut'er?

LUT'ER [*evidently thinking deeply*]. How fur is it?

GIZ. Three an' a half mile.

DOCTOR. Will yer go, Lut'er?

LUT'ER. Uh-h.

DOCTOR. Huh?

GIZ. He said, uh-huh.

[*Lut'er chews in silence.*]

DOCTOR. I thought he said uh-uh.

GIZ. He said uh-huh.

DOCTOR. He didn't say nothin' o' the sort — he said uh-uh.

[*They turn to Lut'er questioningly. He is chewing intensely.*]

LUT'ER [*after a pause*]. How fur did yer say it wuz?

DOCTOR. Three an' a half mile.

[*Silence.*]

GIZ. We'll each take a oar.

[*Silence. A stentorian voice is heard calling "Stee'vun." The Doctor rises, hastily.*]

DOCTOR. What d'yer say, Lut'er?

LUT'ER. It's three an' a half mile ter Lavanny — an' three an' a half mile back. . . . Pretty fur.

DOCTOR. We kin come back on the current.

LUT'ER. Three an' a half mile air three an' a half mile — current or no current.

[*Again the masterful female voice calls "Stee'vun." There is no mistaking its meaning. The Doctor is torn between home and business. Lut'er takes up his rod, rebaits the hook with the fishing-worm from his pocket and casts his line into the river.*]

LUT'ER. I'll think it over . . . but I ain't givin' yuh no hope . . . Three an' a half mile one way air pretty fur . . . but two ways — it's turruble.

DOCTOR. Come on, Giz. We'll talk it over.

[*The Doctor and Giz leave Lut'er to his problem. Lut'er is undecided. He is at a crisis in his life. He spits thoughtfully and looks after the retreating Doctor and Giz.*]

LUT'ER. Three an' a half mile . . . [*He takes in his line and removes the fishing-worm. He rises and looks again after the Doctor and Giz. He hesitates.*] . . . two ways . . . [*He starts in the opposite direction, as he justifies himself to his inner self.*] Rock Springs is fur enough fur me! [*When he disappears the play is over.*]

[*Curtain.*]

FOR ALL TIME

A Play

By Rita Wellman

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CHARACTERS

Monsieur Robert.
Nanette.
Diane Bertral.
Madame le Bargy.

Time: *France, 1915.*

Dedicated to
MAURICE MAETERLINCK,
Whose essay in
"The Wrack of the Storm"
inspired this play.

Application for the right of performing For All Time must be made to Rita Wellman, 142 East 18th Street, New York.

FOR ALL TIME

A Play

By Rita Wellman

[Scene: *Sitting room in the house of Madame le Bargy. Furnished in excellent taste. Main entrance center, this leads into a hall. Another entrance left, back. French window right near back, near this stands a large wing chair. Couch left, well forward. Chairs near this. Nanette comes from the entrance left as Monsieur Robert comes into the room from entrance center. Nanette is a European old maid. Her dark eyes are full of fire and her lips are bitter. She speaks quickly and sharply and is always on the defensive. Monsieur Robert is well groomed, gentle, weak and likable. Nanette is in deep mourning. Monsieur Robert carries a small bunch of flowers which he holds awkwardly and fussily as if they embarrassed him.*]

Nanette. Monsieur Robert. . . .

Robert [*coming forward*]. Nanette . . . How are you, Nanette! You look thinner.

Nanette. Yes, it's the mourning. It's unbecoming.

Robert. I shouldn't say that, Nanette. How is Madame? Tell me. [*Nanette gives an eloquent shrug.*] I haven't dared to come before. You know how I hate anything — anything like a scene.

Nanette [*sitting left*]. Sit down, Monsieur Robert. [*He sits in a chair forward right.*] It was cowardly of you not to come to see Madame.

Robert. Yes, I know. I am such a coward. I cannot imagine how I came to be such a coward, Nanette. I am afraid to do anything any more. Yet my mind keeps so active. How do you account for that? It's my imagination. It seems to run ahead and do things in my place. In these times I am all over the world at once. Nanette, will you believe it, that I suffer actually with every man in the trenches?

Nanette [*contemptuously*]. Oh, I daresay.

Robert. You don't understand my case. I am fifty-five. I have lived for my work always. Why should I give it up now that the world has gone mad? Some one must stay behind and keep things together. Some one must conduct the dull march of everyday life. We can't all be heroes.

Nanette. Your work!

Robert. Well, to be at the head of a big charity. That is something. Countless lives, numberless families are in my care. I am sort of a father to them all, Nanette.

Nanette. They could have a mother as well.

Robert [*with pained eagerness*]. Do you really think that?

Nanette. I know it. There are many women as well fitted for your post as you — better fitted, in fact.

Robert. Oh, surely not. I have had the experience of years. I love my work so. I love my little people.

Nanette. You have made a pleasure out of what should be only your duty. It isn't the poor who couldn't get along without you, Monsieur Robert. It's you who couldn't get along without the poor.

Robert. Well, are we all to live merely to do our duty? Is that what the Germans are going to teach us — to be machines like themselves?

Nanette. I suppose after all, you are better off where you are.

Robert. How do you mean, Nanette?

Nanette. You are more of a woman than a man after all.

Robert. You were always bitter against me, Nanette.

NANETTE. You were always superior with me, because I was not beautiful like Madame nor young like Maurice.

ROBERT. How did you say she was, Nanette?

NANETTE. You will find her greatly changed.

ROBERT. I wanted to come to her as soon as she came from Aix les Bains. When she went to recover the body.

NANETTE [*in a tone of deep feeling*]. Yes, when we went hoping to find Maurice.

ROBERT [*softly*]. Tell me about his death.

NANETTE. There were terrible days in which we could learn nothing certain. Several times they gave up hope. What hope! It only made certainty more unbearable.

ROBERT. They found him at last.

NANETTE. Yes, they found Maurice.

ROBERT. The French. That was good.

NANETTE. No, the Germans.

ROBERT. But Madame wrote me. . . .

NANETTE. That was a lie she told you. The Germans found him. It was they who had the privilege of putting him away to his final rest. He had just won his cross.

ROBERT. He won the cross!

NANETTE. Yes, didn't you hear? That very week. [*Almost overcome with emotion she rises.*] We have it now. [*She goes out back a moment and returns with a small black box which she opens reverently.*] Here is all that we have left of Maurice. [*She hands him a picture post card.*] This was taken only the day before. . . . [*She hands him a letter.*] This was the last letter . . . you can see the date . . . He was never so confident or full of life. . . . There is even a joke about me. He was always making fun of me. I don't know why. [*She hands him a revolver.*] Here is his revolver. [*She takes out the small box with the cross of war and hesitates to give it to him.*] This — this is what we have left in place of Maurice. [*With a violent look she opens the box and then suddenly hands it to him.*]

ROBERT. You mustn't look on it in that way, Nanette.

NANETTE. I can't help it.

ROBERT [*reading*]. Maurice Paul le Bargy. Little Maurice! He was never meant for action either. Do you remember how we used to tease him? He hated to make any decision. He loved life's dreams and nuances.

NANETTE. He was nothing but a dreamer. Madame and I were talking only yesterday of his garden — did we ever tell you of the garden he had when he was a boy?

ROBERT [*handing her the box very carefully*]. No. Tell me about the garden.

NANETTE. He made himself a garden, everything in it was arranged as if for people only an inch high.

ROBERT. But there are no such people.

NANETTE. Of course not. That is why every one made fun of him. But he went on building it just the same. It was scaled so that he was a giant in it. There were little houses and little walks and little boats sailing on lakes two feet across. The geraniums were great trees, his pet turtle was like a prehistoric monster, and the hollyhocks pierced heaven itself. When people told him that no one could really enjoy such a garden he said that the ants could, and they ought to appreciate a little beauty because they were always so busy.

ROBERT. That was like Maurice. How vast the sky must have seemed to him who loved minute shadowy things!

NANETTE. He was always timid. Everything violent frightened him. They made him positively ill. And how he dreaded the sea! Do you remember how Madame tried to get him to swim?

ROBERT. But he did learn to swim finally.

NANETTE. Yes. But he told me one day — "Nanette, when I hear the surf my whole body shakes with fear. I feel as if some terrible giant were calling me. I hate the great sea."

ROBERT. And he fell into the sea, didn't he?

NANETTE. Two thousand feet.

ROBERT. What he must have endured all alone!

NANETTE. No one can know.

[*After a pause.*]

ROBERT. You say Madame has changed?

NANETTE [*looking toward left before speaking*]. Yes.

ROBERT. Why do you look around like that? Is there anything wrong?

NANETTE. Yes, there is.

ROBERT. What do you mean? Is Madame very ill?

NANETTE. There has been a change.

ROBERT. What kind of a change?

NANETTE. Madame has changed. You wouldn't know her, Monsieur Robert.

ROBERT. You mean she has grown old? Madame was always so beautiful. Has her hair turned white?

NANETTE. No, it isn't that.

ROBERT. You mean she is so stricken she can't talk with me? She won't see me?

NANETTE. She will see you. But for your own peace of mind I advise you to go away. I will tell her that you came. That will be the best way.

ROBERT. A change, you say? You mean she has altered so. . . .

NANETTE. Yes. The truth is, it is Madame's mind.

ROBERT. Her mind! No, no, don't tell me that. That is the worst of all. Do you mean that she is not clear in her mind? She wouldn't know me? She wouldn't be able to remember? Nanette, I can't believe it. I can't believe that this great and beautiful woman could give in like that. Everywhere you see the small ones breaking down. But the great spirits like hers — oh they must keep up. What else is there left for us if they give up, too?

NANETTE. If you could hear her talk, Monsieur Robert. The things she says. . . . Sometimes I have to run away and lock my door. I am afraid of her.

ROBERT. I cannot stay now, Nanette. I couldn't bear it. It was hard enough for me before. What can I say to her, Nanette, when my own grief finds no comfort? Maurice was like my own son. He was the fruit of my own soul. Into him went all the spiritual love I had for Madame, the love which for fourteen years. . . .

NANETTE. Monsieur Robert!

ROBERT. Oh, Nanette, forget your piety for once and let me speak my heart out.

NANETTE [*with her strange, bitter coldness*]. No, Monsieur Robert, I can never forget what you call my — piety.

ROBERT. No, you never can. That is why I have never been able to talk to you. Your heart is closed to all but Maurice.

NANETTE. Yes, that is true. My heart has been like one of those vases of domestic use which the ancients buried with the dead in their tombs. All that was warm and beautiful in me is closed away forever with Maurice. Although I was never more to him than a familiar object which was a part of his everyday life. Only his old nurse.

ROBERT. How did he come to inspire such love in every one who came near him?

NANETTE. Because he was young and beautiful.

ROBERT. But that is simply a temporary state.

NANETTE. Maurice would always have been young and beautiful.

ROBERT. Yes, he made you believe that. When he talked with you you felt glad and young as if you'd heard music.

NANETTE. He loved life.

ROBERT. Yet he was a coward.

NANETTE. But he always dared to do what he was afraid to do.

ROBERT. Yes, that is where he was different from me. That is what I have never been able to do — to dare as far as I could imagine.

[*He goes slowly toward the back.*]

NANETTE [*rising*]. You are going?

ROBERT. Yes. I can't see her. You see the state I am in. What could I say to her? I had better go.

NANETTE. Yes, it is the best way for you both.

[*Robert hesitates at the chair right. He tentatively puts a hand out to touch the arm of it, and regards it curiously.*]

NANETTE [*unsteadily*]. What are you doing?

ROBERT. It is strange . . . [*Suddenly he falls into the chair and buries his head in the cushions, sobbing and calling.*] Maurice! Maurice!

NANETTE [*hoarsely*]. Monsieur Robert. [*As he does not answer — sharply and frightened.*] Monsieur Robert!

ROBERT [*rises slowly, a little dazed, but calm*]. Yes, yes, I know. I am trying your nerves. Forgive me. I am going now, Nanette. Here — I was forgetting — The flowers I brought for Madame. You will give them to her, Nanette.

NANETTE. Monsieur Robert, why did you act in that way just now? Why did you go to that chair?

ROBERT. I don't know.

NANETTE. When we came home from Aix les Bains I thought Madame would go wild. She tore her clothes. She went striding about the house from room to room calling at the top of her voice — Maurice, Maurice. She went into all the rooms, into his room, looking into the closets — everywhere — Then she came running down here. She went back into the back sitting room where she is now — then back into this room. At last she came to that chair.

ROBERT. To that chair, Nanette? Are you sure?

NANETTE. To that very chair. Then she flung herself down into it and cried. That was the first time she had cried. I went away. When I came back she was still there. And then this strange and terrible change came over her.

ROBERT. How do you mean?

NANETTE. A peculiar quiet, an awful calm like death — only more terrible.

ROBERT. Yes, that is how I felt.

NANETTE. Just now in that chair?

ROBERT. Yes, just now.

NANETTE. A calm, you say?

ROBERT. Yes, like a hand pressed over my heart.

NANETTE. But you seemed happier, Monsieur Robert.

ROBERT. I am happier, Nanette. [*He goes toward back.*] I am going.

[*He goes out at center. Nanette watches him dumbfounded. She then gets the black box, carefully puts away her keepsakes, and takes the box out center, returning almost at the same time that Diane Bertral enters. Diane Bertral is a beautiful woman of about twenty-eight. She is nervous and ill at ease, almost hysterical.*]

DIANE. Does Madame le Bargy live here?

NANETTE. Yes, she does. Where can Julie be? Did the maid let you in?

DIANE. No, the gentleman who just went out . . . he left the door open for me. He evidently thought I was a friend.

NANETE. Did you want to see Madame le Bargy?

DIANE. Yes, very much. Could I see her, do you think?

NANETTE. She is back in her own sitting room. She isn't to be disturbed.

DIANE. No, I suppose not. I shouldn't have come.

NANETTE. If you wished to speak with her about anything important I can take the message.

DIANE [*absently*]. No — no. . . .

NANETTE [*regarding her suspiciously*]. You know Madame le Bargy personally?

DIANE. No, no, I don't.

NANETTE. I thought not.

[*Sitting.*]

DIANE. May I sit down here for a moment? I am so tired. I have walked all the way, or rather I have run most of it. I am all out of breath.

NANETTE. If you will let me know your message at once. . . . Otherwise there is a seat down at the concierge. I am very busy.

[*She goes toward back, with her lips set.*]

DIANE [*rising*]. The truth is. . . . I can't tell you. It is something personal.

NANETTE. Something personal? Perhaps you are mistaken in the Madame le Bargy . . . this is Madame Jeanne le Bargy — the writer. . . .

DIANE. Yes, yes, I know. Mightn't I speak with her for a moment?

NANETTE. That is impossible. Since the death of her son Madame le Bargy has seen no one. No one at all.

DIANE. I might have known. Let me think. My mind has been so confused lately. I have been in such a state of mind — I don't know what to do. I came running here without any idea in my head. I felt that I would be all right if I could only see Madame le Bargy.

NANETTE [*tersely*]. Perhaps Mademoiselle had better see the doctor. At the end of the street — number 27 — you will find an excellent physician.

DIANE. No physician on earth can cure me.

NANETTE [*after giving her an uneasy, distrustful look*]. Well, since you cannot see Madame le Bargy, and since you have no message for her, I must ask you please to excuse me. I am busy.

[*She stands waiting for Diane to go, regarding her with undisguised hostility.*]

DIANE. Yes, I will go. Why did I ever come? It was a mad idea. I see now that the things which seem so simple and easy in the heat of your own mind are the hardest of all to accomplish when you meet the coldness of other minds. Don't trouble about me. I am going. I didn't come to harm you or Madame in any way.

[*As she goes toward the door she passes the chair at right and stops. She goes toward it curiously, then hopefully. Finally she flings herself into it as Robert has done, and sobs the name—"Maurice! Maurice!"*]

NANETTE [*horrified*]. Mademoiselle!

[*Diane rises slowly, looking about her in a dazed way. Then she suddenly leaves the chair.*]

DIANE [*quietly*]. Forgive me. I will go quietly now.

NANETTE [*trembling*]. Mademoiselle. Just now—you spoke a name. . . .

DIANE. Yes.

NANETTE. Was it—Maurice?

DIANE. Yes.

NANETTE [*drawing away, her face going black*]. I see.

DIANE [*going up to her curiously*]. Who are you?

NANETTE [*drawing herself up, showing the utmost contempt, hatred and fear of Diane*]. Who are *you?*

DIANE. My name is Diane Bertral.

NANETTE. Who *are* you?

DIANE. Just that.

NANETTE [*as before*]. I see.

DIANE [*passionately*]. Madame, listen to me. . . .

NANETTE. Mademoiselle. . . .

DIANE. Mademoiselle — are you — Nanette?

NANETTE [*who seems to grow small with dread*]. Those who know me well call me that.

DIANE. He often spoke of you. He told me of you. You were his old nurse. You were very dear to him. He always said he was the only person to reach your heart. [*Seizing Nanette's hand.*] Nanette! Let me call you Nanette! Let me touch you. Let me know that heart which he could waken. I am so in need of help. I am so in need of love.

NANETTE [*drawing away*]. Mademoiselle!

DIANE. You have lost Maurice. You know what I feel. Only you can know. Help me. Let us help each other! We can never be strangers for our hearts bear the same sorrow.

NANETTE. I don't understand. [*Growing stern with the realization.*] Maurice! Can it be that Maurice. . . . No, that is impossible. He was not like that.

DIANE. Nanette. I loved Maurice. He loved me.

NANETTE [*recoiling as if at a great obscenity*]. Oh!

DIANE. Why do you speak like that? What could there be in our love for each other that was wrong? If you only knew what we were to each other. If you only knew, Nanette. . . .

NANETTE [*hoarsely*]. Maurice. . . . I can scarcely believe it.

DIANE. Let me talk to you about him. Let me tell you about us. [*She sits on the couch left, and feverishly begins to talk.*] I am an actress. We met at a supper party after the theater. You know how shy Maurice was. He was afraid of most people. I saw that. I drew him to one side and got him to talk. He was like a child when any one took a real interest in him. He told me all about himself at once, about you, and about Madame le Bargy. . . .

NANETTE [*passionately*]. Oh, keep still!

DIANE [*not noticing Nanette's hostility*]. And about your house in the country, and his garden and books and his piano and all the things he loved. Then he went on and told me about his work, and how he wanted to be a great writer, how he wanted to carry on what was best in the French theater. He promised to show me his play.

NANETTE. His play!

DIANE. I told him to come to my house and read it to me. He came the next day. It was the twenty-first of March. I remember the date perfectly.

NANETTE. We always left town on that day, but we could not get Maurice to go, so we had to leave him behind. Now I understand.

DIANE. Yes. He stayed to lunch with me, and that afternoon I had him read his play to me. Do you remember how beautiful his voice was? It started in a sort of sing song, like a child singing itself

to sleep, but as he went on his voice grew deeper and stronger, all your senses melted into his voice and he carried you along as if on a great wave of emotion, of ecstasy. Monsieur Laugier came later. He was my manager then. I had Maurice read the play to him. And later some other people came, and every one urged Monsieur Laugier to take the play. I begged him to read it. I will never forget it. It seemed to me the most important thing in the world. Well, as you know, Monsieur Laugier did produce Maurice's play. And, although they wouldn't let me be in it, I always considered it my play, too.

NANETTE. Then the story he told us of his meeting with Monsieur Laugier — that wasn't true?

DIANE. No. I invented that for him to tell you.

NANETTE. He lied to us!

DIANE. You would never have understood.

NANETTE. Let me think — Maurice's play was produced in September, 1913. That is two years ago. Two years. . . . Maurice lived here with us — day after day — saying nothing — telling us nothing — We never suspected. We never dreamed that he would deceive us.

DIANE. He did not deceive you. Not even the closest hearts can reveal everything.

NANETTE. But to continue to see you . . . all that time! It is unthinkable.

DIANE. How could he explain what he didn't understand himself? How could he tell you of what was a mystery to him? From the first moment we met we lived and thought and felt as one being.

NANETTE [*vehemently*]. No! With *us* he was like that! He was like that with us.

DIANE. With me!

NANETTE. To think of it! A common actress!

DIANE [*jumping up*]. How could you?

NANETTE. If I had known of this affair I would have gone straight to you.

DIANE. And what could you have done?

NANETTE [*significantly*]. I could have found a way.

DIANE. You are a terrible old woman.

NANETTE. Am I terrible? I had to fight my way when I was your age — because I was not pretty. I had the choice of being a free drudge or some man's slave. So I chose to toil alone. In order to get along alone I had to stifle every drop of humanity in my being. I had to bind up my human instincts as they bind up the breasts of mothers who flow too bounteously with life-blood long after their babes have need of it. I had to become sharp and bitter because sweetness and softness get crushed under in the battle to live. I learned to fight and I forgot to feel. Then, when I was used up and hard I met Madame le Bargy and she took me into her house because I had one valuable thing left. I had learned that it is wiser to be honest. I was there when Maurice was born.

DIANE. You were with him from the very beginning then.

NANETTE. I was an old maid of thirty-five. I had always lived alone. I hadn't ever had a dog to care for. Then all at once I had this baby, this little baby. I had his baby cries to call me. I had his tiny hands to kiss. I used to press my lips against his throbbing head, against the soft fissure where life and death meet, and I would say to myself, "Here, with one pressure I can crush away life. Here, with one pressure is where immortal life must have entered."

DIANE. Then later — when he grew up. . . .

NANETTE. Day by day I watched over him. Madame was busy. Even after her husband died she was in the world. She had her writing. She had her friends. Her heart was fed in a hundred different ways. While I — I had only Maurice.

DIANA. I understand.

NANETTE. I lived only for Maurice. When I saw that it was raining I thought of Maurice. When I saw that the sun shone I thought of Maurice. If I was awakened suddenly in the night his name was on my lips. It seemed to me I could not take a deep breath for fear of disturbing his image against my heart.

DIANE. Nanette! Can you believe that I have felt that way too?

NANETTE. You!

DIANE. Yes, yes, I have. Nanette, when he was little, when he was a boy growing up, did you never think of me?

NANETTE. Of you!

DIANE. Yes, of the woman who would

eventually take your place. Didn't you think of what she would be like, didn't you plan her, didn't you pray that she might be fine and great and beautiful? I know you did. You must have! Well, I tried to mold myself that way. I tried to be worthy of every dream you could have had for him, that his mother could have had. That is how I loved him.

NANETTE. Do you know what I thought of when the idea of a woman for Maurice came into my mind? I thought that when she came — if she ever did —

[*She pauses, looking ahead of her.*]

DIANE. Yes?

NANETTE [*turning and looking at Diane vindictively*]. I would kill her!

DIANE. Nanette, I would have killed myself rather than harm Maurice.

NANETTE. They why did you allow him to throw himself away?

DIANE. Throw himself away! Nanette, I never knew what love was until Maurice came. I was older than he. I knew life better. I knew myself better. I had struggled. You say that you had to struggle because you weren't pretty. I had to struggle because I was. You can't know what it is to have every other man you meet want to possess you, not because he loves you, but because your face suggests love to him and he hasn't learned to know the difference. He finds that out later, and then he reproaches you for being beautiful.

NANETTE. To think that Maurice should fall so low!

DIANE. But I came to know things. I was determined to find love. From man to man, Nanette, I climbed up and up, picking my way, falling and getting up again. Only the truly educated can love. I loved Maurice with all the wisdom I had accumulated in years of suffering. I gave him a perfect gift I had molded in pain.

NANETTE. You! What had *you* to give?

DIANE. Then the war broke out.

NANETTE. Yes, the war. Maurice was one of the first. He made up his mind at once.

DIANE. No, he did *not* make up his mind at once.

NANETTE [*with a dreadful realization*]. Then it was. . . .

DIANE. I made up his mind for him.

NANETTE [*vehemently*]. You did it! It was you then! You sent Maurice to war. After they excused him! After they gave him a post at home! You sent him to his death. Oh, I hated you before, but now. . . .

DIANE. His mother and you clung to him. There was one excuse after the other. You made him believe that he was too delicate and sensitive. You used all of your influence. Madame le Bargy tried in every way to keep him. She even testified officially that Maurice was weak from birth and had dizzy spells and an unaccountable fear of the sea. And you testified under oath to a long and dangerous illness he had had in childhood.

NANETTE. I did that. And it was all a lie.

DIANE. But all the time I was urging him to go. We three women fought for mastery. But you see who won! I did! When he came to me at nights — in the country — to my little house where we had been so happy, there, there, in the very room where we were nearest, then I persuaded him. With my kisses, Nanette, with my arms, with all the power I had over him — then was when I thrust him away.

NANETTE [*triumphantly*]. You didn't love him then!

DIANE [*passionately*]. Could I love Maurice and see him stay behind? Could I really want him to save his body for me when thousands were giving theirs for France?

NANETTE. For France. . . . But what of us?

DIANE. Oh, the selfishness of those who have never really loved!

NANETTE. Never loved! How can you say that I have never loved?

DIANE. What can you know of my loss? Your love was a habit. It was the love you could have lavished on a dog, or a horse or anything. But with me — now that he is gone, I have lost everything. I have no place to turn. I haven't even memory, as you have. Your love always took on the color of memory, but mine was a living, flaming thing, necessary as food and drink — as life itself!

NANETTE [*white with passion*]. But

my love was pure and yours was not. [*She crosses the room.*] Good God, to think that this thing should ever have happened to us in this house! [*She covers her face with her hands and runs out back.*]

[*After a moment Madame le Bargy enters, left. She is a handsome woman of fifty or more. She wears a long loose gown of white silk. Her voice is perfectly modulated and beautiful. There is about her a gentleness and nobility of perfect spiritual strength. She looks at Diane curiously for a moment, and then goes to her with hand outstretched. During the following the day is fast becoming dark, and the sun's setting is seen from the French window.*]

MADAME LE BARGY. I heard Nanette's voice. She has a habit of keeping people from me, although I am always glad to see any one. May I know your name?

DIANE. My name is Diane Bertral.

MADAME LE BARGY. Diane Betral. I have never heard of you.

DIANE. No. I am an actress. But I am not so very well known. Are you Madame le Bargy?

MADAME LE BARGY. Yes. Won't you sit down on the couch there? Why did you come to see me, Mademoiselle?

[*She sits at right forward.*]

DIANE [*embarrassed*]. I came. . . . I don't know why I came, Madame le Bargy.

MADAME LE BARGY. You know some one I know, perhaps — some friend of us both.

DIANE. Yes, that is it. Some one we have both — lost.

MADAME LE BARGY [*with a quick look at Diane*]. A *dear* friend?

DIANE. Yes, a very dear friend.

MALAME LE BARGY. Do you mean — Maurice?

DIANE. Yes.

MADAME LE BARGY. You knew him well?

DIANE. I loved him.

MADAME LE BARGY. Yes, I know.

DIANE [*astonished*]. You know!

MADAME LE BARGY. Yes, Maurice has told me.

DIANE. No, no; that I am sure of. I am sure he never has. He has never told a soul. That was our agreement. We were to keep it secret and sacred. Not even you were to know, not as long as we lived.

MADAME LE BARGY [*gently*]. But after. . . .?

DIANE [*puzzled*]. After?

MADAME LE BARGY. How long did you know Maurice?

DIANE. It would be two years this March.

MADAME LE BARGY. You loved each other all that time?

DIANE. From the very first. We never had any of those preliminaries in which people have a chance to deceive each other. We came together directly and frankly and we never regretted it.

MADAME LE BARGY. Maurice was very young.

DIANE. He was twenty-four. He was eager for life. But you two had kept him back. You had warmed his heart with your kind of love until he had begun to think it was the only love which is worthy.

MADAME LE BARGY. And you believe that that isn't so?

DIANE [*simply*]. I believe that there can be no flame like the love between two young people who are one.

MADAME LE BARGY [*going to Diane and putting a hand on her shoulder*]. Poor little woman.

DIANE [*astounded*]. Madame!

MADAME LE BARGY. You have been suffering a great deal, Diane.

DIANE [*bursting into wild weeping*]. Oh, Madame, how good you are, how kind you are! [*Grasping Madame's arms, she trembles and sobs.*] Oh, how can I ever tell you? Thank you, thank you! [*She jumps up and paces about the room.*] What am I going to do with myself? How can I go on? I simply can't stand it. If I had only died with Maurice! If I could only have died in his place! Oh, the cruelty of it! Why did they have to pick out *my* lover? Surely there are thousands of others. Why did it have to be just mine? Mine — when I needed him so! He might have been spared a little longer, to give me time to get used to it. That would have been better. But now! Just as he was beginning to be of service, too. Why he hadn't been there a year yet. Not even a year! [*Beating*

her hips violently.] I could tear myself to pieces. I hate myself for going on living. I detest myself for being alive when he is dead.

MADAME LE BARGY [*who has watched Diane with infinite pity — softly*]. Diane, do you think that I loved my son?

DIANE [*in surprise*]. Why, yes, Madame, I believe that you loved Maurice.

MADAME LE BARGY. You think that my love was not as great as yours?

DIANE. No, I don't think so. You had had your life. Maurice and I were only beginning ours.

MADAME LE BARGY. Which do you think is the greater love, Diane, the love which endures for the moment, or the love which endures for all time?

DIANE [*puzzled*]. For all time. . . .?

MADAME LE BARGY. For all time.

DIANE. We have the dear lips to kiss, the dear head to caress, but when these are gone there is only memory — and that is torture.

MADAME LE BARGY. What if I should tell you that Maurice still lives, Diane?

DIANE [*rushing to her*]. Madame! My God, is this true?

MADAME LE BARGY [*gently*]. Maurice still lives, Diane. He talks with me every day.

DIANE [*slowly*]. He talks with you. . . .

MADAME LE BARGY [*holding her gaze*]. Yes, Diane, he talks with me.

DIANE [*the hope dies out of her face and she turns away*]. I understand.

MADAME LE BARGY. You see, you did not love Maurice.

DIANE. How can you tell me that — that I didn't love him?

MADAME LE BARGY. Because you don't continue to do so.

DIANE. But how can I love what no longer exists?

MADAME LE BARGY. Oh, the selfishness of those who have never really loved!

DIANE. That is what I said to Nanette — and now you say the same thing to me.

MADAME LE BARGY. Diane, when I knew for certain that Maurice had fallen into the sea, that they had recovered his body, that he was buried in German soil, then I felt that I should never live another moment. I felt as you have felt. I wanted to die. I could not bear it. I came here to this house. I was mad for the sight of him, for the things that he had touched and loved. I flew into his room and dragged his clothes from the pegs and crushed them to me, but even the odor and touch of his personal belongings was not enough to calm me. I came into this room. Then I drew near that chair. Something — I don't know what — drove me to sit in it. I flung myself into it as if it were into his arms, and I wept out all my grief. Then, all at once, a great calm came over me. I looked upon my solemn black dress in amazement and distaste. I looked into my solemn and black heart with surprise and shame. I felt that Maurice was *alive,* that he was not *dead,* Diane. Then I remembered, as I sat there, that it was in this chair that he had sat when he came to say good-by. There he had sat talking happily and confidently — he had seemed filled with radiance. And so he has talked to me again and again. Every day, at the same time, at twilight, I have sat there and felt myself with Maurice. We have talked together, just as we always did. There is nothing weird or supernatural about it, Diane. He is just as we knew him, as we knew him in those swift, strange moments when, in a flash, the body seems to slip aside and spirit rushes out to meet spirit. That is all. People see me cheerful and smiling and they say that I am mad. The few to whom I have told of these talks pity me and are sure that I have lost my reason. Perhaps, in a worldly sense, I am mad. But I know this, Diane, that Maurice lives as usual, more truly, than he did six weeks ago. I know that his youth has not been sacrificed in vain. As the dead plant enriches the soil from which it grew and into which it finally falls, so will this young soul in all its bloom enrich the life out of which it sprang and from which it can never entirely disappear.

DIANE [*after a pause — rising*]. That is beautiful, but I cannot do it. [*Stretching out her arms.*] My arms are aching with emptiness.

MADAME LE BARGY. You see that you did not really love, Diane.

DIANE. Perhaps not. But it was the greatest I was capable of.

[*She gets a scarf she has dropped and goes toward the back.*]

MADAME LE BARGY [*softly*]. This is the time, Diane.

DIANE. When you talk with him?

MADAME LE BARGY. Yes.

[*Diane goes slowly and sinks into the chair wearily. Suddenly she flings her arms out, crying "Maurice, Maurice." Madame le Bargy rises and goes to her.*

DIANE. Maurice, come back to me! Dear God, give him back to me!

[*Nanette enters at back with her black box. She sees Diane in the chair. Suddenly she takes out the revolver and shoots Diane.*]

NANETTE. Maurice! Forgive me!

MADAME LE BARGY. Nanette! Child! My child! [*She rushes to take Diane in her arms.*] Nanette, what have you done, what have you done?

NANETTE. I have rid Maurice of a stain.

DIANE [*calling softly*]. Maurice, Maurice. . . . Oh, I knew you couldn't stay away. I knew you would come back to me. Now we will never be separated. We will be together like this for always — for all time.

MADAME LE BARGY [*softly*]. For all time, Diane.

NANETTE [*kneeling beside Diane — crossing herself*]. For all time.

[*Curtain.*]

THE FINGER OF GOD

A Play

By Percival Wilde

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The Finger of God was produced by the Wisconsin Players at the Wisconsin Little Theatre, Wilwaukee, Wis., March 28, 1916, and subsequently, with the following cast:

Strickland.....*Frederick Irving Deakin.*
Benson.....*Harry V. Meissner.*
A Girl.....*Marjorie Frances Hollis.*

Under the direction of Frederic Irving Deakin.

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THE FINGER OF GOD

A Play

By Percival Wilde

[*The living room of Strickland's apartment. At the rear, a doorway, heavily curtained, leads into another room. At the left of the doorway, a bay window, also heavily curtained, is set into the diagonal wall. Near the center, an ornate writing desk, upon which is a telephone. At the right, the main entrance. The furnishings, in general, are luxurious and costly.*

As the curtain rises Strickland, kneeling, is burning papers in a grate near the main door. Benson, his valet, is packing a suitcase which lies open on the writing desk. It is ten-thirty; a bitterly cold night in winter.]

Strickland. Benson!

Benson. Yes, sir.

Strickland. Close the window: it's cold.

Benson [*goes to the window*]. The window *is* closed, sir. It's been closed all evening.

Strickland [*shivers and buttons his coat tightly*]. Benson.

Benson. Yes, sir?

Strickland. Don't forget a heavy overcoat.

Benson. I've put it in already, sir.

Strickland. Plenty of fresh linen?

Benson. Yes, sir.

Strickland. Collars and ties?

Benson. I've looked out for everything, sir.

Strickland [*after a pause*]. You sent off the trunks this afternoon?

Benson. Yes, sir.

Strickland. You're sure they can't be traced?

Benson. I had one wagon take them to a vacant lot, and another wagon take them to the station.

Strickland. Good!

Benson. I checked them through to Chicago. Here are the checks. [*He hands them over.*] What train do we take, sir?

Strickland. *I* take the midnight. You follow me some time next week. We mustn't be seen leaving town together.

Benson. How will I find you in Chicago?

Strickland. You won't. You'll take rooms somewheres, and I'll take rooms somewheres else till it's all blown over. When I want you I'll put an ad in the "Tribune."

Benson. You don't know when that will be, sir?

Strickland. As soon as I think it is safe. It may be two weeks. It may be a couple of months. But you will stay in Chicago till you hear from me one way or the other. You understand?

Benson. Yes, sir.

Strickland. Have you plenty of money?

Benson. Not enough to last a couple of months.

Strickland [*producing a large pocketbook*]. How much do you want?

Benson. Five or six hundred.

Strickland [*takes out a few bills. Stops*]. Wait a minute! I left that much in my bureau drawer.

[*He goes toward the door.*]

Benson. Mr. Strickland?

Strickland. Yes?

Benson. It's the midnight train for Chicago, isn't it?

Strickland. Yes.

[*He goes into the next room.*]

Benson [*waits an instant. Then he lifts the telephone receiver, and speaks very quietly*]. Hello. Murray Hill 3500. . . . Hello. This Finley? This is Benson. . . . He's going to take the midnight train for Chicago. Pennsylvania. You

had better arrest him at the station. If he once gets to Chicago you'll never find him. And, Finley, you won't forget *me*, will you? . . . I want five thousand dollars for it. Yes, five thousand. That's little enough. He's got almost three hundred thousand on him, and you won't turn in *all* of that to Headquarters. Yes, it's cash. Large bills. [*Strickland's step is heard.*] Midnight for Chicago.

[*Benson hangs up the receiver and is busy with the suitcase as Strickland enters.*]

STRICKLAND. Here's your money, Benson. Count it.

BENSON [*after counting*]. Six hundred dollars, thank you, sir. [*He picks up the closed suitcase.*] Shall I go now?

STRICKLAND. No. Wait a minute. [*He goes to the telephone.*] Hello, Madison Square 7900. . . . Pennsylvania? I want a stateroom for Chicago, midnight train. Yes, to-night.

BENSON. Don't give your own name, sir.

STRICKLAND. No. The name is Stevens. . . . Oh, you have one reserved in that name already? Well, this is *Alfred* Stevens. . . . You have it reserved in that name? Then give me another stateroom. . . . What? You haven't any other? [*He pauses in an instant's thought. Then, decisively*]: Never mind, then. Good-by. [*He turns to Benson.*] Benson, go right down to the Pennsylvania, and get the stateroom that is reserved for Alfred Stevens. You've got to get there before he does. Wait for me at the train gate.

BENSON. Yes, sir.

STRICKLAND. Don't waste any time. I'll see you later.

BENSON. Very well, sir.

[*He takes up the suitcase, and goes.*]

STRICKLAND [*left alone, opens drawer after drawer of the desk systematically, dumping what few papers are still left into the fire. Outside a wintry gale whistles, and shakes the locked window. Suddenly there is a knock at the door. He pauses, very much startled. A little wait, and then the knock, a single knock, is repeated. He rises, goes to the door, opens it.*] Who's there?

A GIRL. I, sir.

[*She enters. She is young: certainly under thirty: perhaps under twenty-five: possibly still younger. A somewhat shabby boa of some dark fur encircles her neck, and makes her pallid face stand out with startling distinctness from beneath a mass of lustrous brown hair. And as she steps over the threshold she gives a little shiver of comfort, for it is cold outside, and her thin shoulders have been shielded from the driving snow by a threadbare coat. She enters the warm room gracefully, and little rivulets of melted ice trickle to the floor from her inadequate clothing. Her lips are blue. Her hands tremble in their worn white gloves. A seat before a blazing fire, or perhaps, a sip of some strong cordial — this is what she needs. But Strickland has no time for such things. He greets her with a volley of questions.*]

STRICKLAND. Who are you?

THE GIRL. Who, don't you remember me, sir?

STRICKLAND. No.

THE GIRL. I'm from the office, sir.

STRICKLAND. The office?

THE GIRL. *Your* office. I'm one of your personal stenographers, sir.

STRICKLAND. Oh. I suppose I didn't recognize you on account of the hat. What do you want?

THE GIRL. There were some letters which came late this afternoon —

STRICKLAND [*interrupting harshly*]. And you're bothering me with them now? [*He crosses to the door, and holds it open.*] I've got no time. Good night.

THE GIRL [*timidly*]. I thought you'd want to see these letters.

STRICKLAND. Plenty of time to-morrow.

THE GIRL. But you won't be here to-morrow, will you?

STRICKLAND [*starting violently*]. Won't be here? What do you mean?

THE GIRL. You're taking the train to Chicago to-night.

STRICKLAND. How did you know — [*He stops himself. Then, with forced ease.*] Taking a train to Chicago? Of course not! What put that in your head?

THE GIRL. Why, you told me, sir.

STRICKLAND. *I* told you?

THE GIRL. You said so this afternoon.

STRICKLAND [*harshly*]. I didn't see you this afternoon!

THE GIRL [*without contradicting him*]. No, sir? [*She produces a time-table.*] Then I found this time-table.

[*She holds it out. He snatches it.*]

STRICKLAND. Where did you find it?

THE GIRL. On your desk, sir.

STRICKLAND. On my desk?

THE GIRL. Yes, sir.

STRICKLAND [*suddenly and directly*]. You're lying!

THE GIRL. Why, Mr. Strickland!

STRICKLAND. That time-table never reached my desk! I lost it between the railroad station and my office.

THE GIRL. Did you, sir? But it's the same time-table: you see, you checked the midnight train. [*He looks at her suspiciously.*] I reserved a stateroom for you.

STRICKLAND [*astonished*]. You reserved a stateroom?

THE GIRL [*smiling*]. I knew you'd forget it. You have your head so full of other things. So I telephoned as soon as you left the office.

STRICKLAND [*biting his lip angrily*]. I suppose you made the reservation in my own name?

THE GIRL. No, sir.

STRICKLAND [*immensely surprised*]. What?

THE GIRL. I thought you'd prefer some other name: you didn't want your trip to be known.

STRICKLAND. No, I didn't. [*A good deal startled, he looks at her as if he were about to ask, "How did you know that?" She returns his gaze unflinchingly. The question remains unasked. But a sudden thought strikes him.*] What name did you give?

THE GIRL. Stevens, sir.

STRICKLAND [*thunderstruck*]. Stevens?

THE GIRL. Alfred Stevens.

STRICKLAND [*gasping*]. What made you choose that name?

THE GIRL. I don't know, sir.

STRICKLAND. You don't *know?*

THE GIRL. No, sir. It was just the first name that popped into my head. I said "Stevens," and when the clerk asked for the first name, I said "Alfred."

STRICKLAND [*after a pause*]. Have you ever *known* anybody of that name?

THE GIRL. No, sir.

STRICKLAND [*with curious insistence*]. You are *sure* you never knew anybody of that name?

THE GIRL. How can I be sure? I may have; I don't remember it.

STRICKLAND [*abruptly*]. How old are you? [*He gives her no time to answer.*] You're not twenty, are you?

THE GIRL [*smiling*]. Do you think so?

STRICKLAND [*continuing the current of his thoughts*]. And I'm forty-seven. It was more than twenty-five years ago. . . . You couldn't have known.

THE GIRL [*after a pause*]. No, sir.

STRICKLAND [*looking at her with something of fear in his eye*]. What is your name?

THE GIRL. Does it matter? You didn't recognize my *face* a few minutes ago; my *name* can't mean much to you. I'm just one of the office force: I'm the girl who answers when you push the button three times. [*She opens a handbag.*] These are the letters I brought with me.

STRICKLAND [*not offering to take them*]. What are they about?

THE GIRL [*opening the first*]. This is from a woman who wants to invest some money.

STRICKLAND. How much?

THE GIRL. Only a thousand dollars.

STRICKLAND. Why didn't you turn it over to the clerks?

THE GIRL. The savings of a lifetime, she writes.

STRICKLAND. What of it?

THE GIRL. She wrote that she had confidence in you. She says that she wants you to invest it for her yourself.

STRICKLAND. You shouldn't have bothered me with that. [*He pauses.*] Did she inclose the money?

THE GIRL. Yes. A certified check.

[*She hands it over to him.*]

STRICKLAND [*taking the check, and putting it in his pocketbook*]. Write her — oh, you know what to write: that I will give the matter my personal attention.

THE GIRL. Yes, sir. She says she doesn't want a big return on her investment. She wants something that will be perfectly safe, and she knows you will take care of her.

STRICKLAND. Yes. Of course. What else have you?

THE GIRL. A dozen other letters like it.

STRICKLAND. All from old women?

THE GIRL [*seriously*]. Some of them. Here is one from a young man who has saved a little money. He says that when he gets a little more he's going to open a store, and go into business for himself. Here is another from a girl whose father was an ironworker. He was killed accidentally, and she wants you to invest the insurance. Here is another from — but they're all pretty much alike.

STRICKLAND. Why did you bring them here?

THE GIRL. Every one of these letters asks you to do the investing yourself.

STRICKLAND. Oh!

THE GIRL. And you're leaving town to-night. Here are the checks. [*She passes them over.*] Every one of them is made out to you personally; not to the firm.

STRICKLAND [*after a pause*]. You shouldn't have come here. . . . I haven't time to bother with that sort of thing. Every man who has five dollars to invest asks the head of the firm to attend to it himself. It means nothing. I get hundreds of letters like those.

THE GIRL. Still —

STRICKLAND. What?

THE GIRL. You must do something to deserve such letters or they wouldn't keep on coming in. [*She smiles.*] It's a wonderful thing to inspire such confidence in people?

STRICKLAND. Do you think so?

THE GIRL. It is more than wonderful! It is magnificent! These people don't know you from Adam. Not one in a hundred has seen you: not one in a thousand calls you by your first name. But they've all heard of you: you're as real to them as if you were a member of their family. And what is even more real than you is your reputation! Something in which they rest their absolute confidence: something in which they place their implicit trust!

STRICKLAND [*slowly*]. So you think there are few honest men?

THE GIRL. No: there are many of them. But there is something about you that is different: something in the tone of your voice: something in the way you shake hands: something in the look of your eye, that is reassuring. There is never a doubt — never a question about you. Oh, it's splendid! Simply splendid! [*She pauses.*] What a satisfaction it must be to you to walk along the street and know that every one you meet must say to himself, "There goes an honest man!" It's been such an inspiration to me!

STRICKLAND. To *you?*

THE GIRL. Oh, I know that I'm just one of the office force to you. You don't even know my name. But you don't imagine that any one can see you as I have seen you, can work with you as I have worked with you, without there being *some* kind of an effect? You know, in my own troubles —

STRICKLAND [*interrupting*]. So *you* have troubles?

THE GIRL. You don't pay me a very big salary, and there are others whom I must help. But I'm not complaining. [*She smiles.*] I — I used to be like the other girls. I used to watch the clock. I used to count the hours and the minutes till the day's work was over. But it's different now.

STRICKLAND [*slowly*]. How — different?

THE GIRL. I thought it over, and I made up my mind that it wasn't right to count the minutes you worked for an honest man. [*Strickland turns away.*] And there is a new pleasure in my work: I do my best — that's all I can do, but *you* do your best, and it's the *least* I can do.

STRICKLAND [*after a pause*]. Are you sure — I do my best? Are you sure I am an honest man?

THE GIRL. Don't you know it yourself, Mr. Strickland?

STRICKLAND [*after another pause*]. You remember — a few minutes ago, you spoke the name of Alfred Stevens?

THE GIRL. Yes.

STRICKLAND. Suppose I told you that there once *was* an Alfred Stevens? [*The girl does not answer.*] Suppose I told you that Stevens, whom I knew, stole money — stole it when there was no excuse for it — when he didn't need it. His people had plenty, and they gave him plenty. But the chance came, and he couldn't resist the temptation. . . . He was eighteen years old then.

THE GIRL [*gently*]. Only a boy.

STRICKLAND. Only a boy, yes, but he had the dishonest streak in him! Other boys passed by the same opportunity. Stevens didn't even know what to do with the money when he had stolen it. They caught him in less than twenty-four hours. It was almost funny.

THE GIRL. He was punished.

STRICKLAND [*nodding*]. He served a year in jail. God! What a year! His folks wouldn't do a thing for him: they said such a thing had never happened in the family. And they let him take the consequences. [*He pauses.*] When he got out — [*stopping to correct himself*] — when he was *let* out, his family offered him help. But he was too proud to accept the help: it hadn't been offered when he needed it most. He told his family that he never wanted to see them again. He changed his name so they couldn't find him. He left his home town. He came here.

THE GIRL. And he has been honest ever since!

STRICKLAND. Ever since: for twenty-eight years! It was hard at times, terribly hard! In the beginning, when he had to go hungry and cold, when he saw other men riding around in carriages, he wondered if he hadn't made a mistake. He had knocked about a good deal; he had learnt a lot, and he wouldn't have been caught so easily the second time. It was *almost* worth taking the chance! It was *almost* worth getting a foot of lead pipe, and waiting in some dark street, waiting, waiting for some sleek *honest* man with his pockets full of money! It would have been so simple! And he knew *how!* I don't know why he didn't do it.

THE GIRL. Tell me more.

STRICKLAND. He managed to live. It wasn't pleasant living. But he stayed alive! I don't like to think of what he did to stay alive: it was humiliating; it was shameful, because he hadn't been brought up to do that kind of thing, but it was honest. Honest, and when he walked home from his work at six o'clock, walked home to save the nickel, his betters never crowded him because they didn't want to soil their clothes with his *honest* dirt! He had thought the year in jail was terrible. The first year he was free was worse. He had never been hungry in jail.

THE GIRL. Then his chance came.

STRICKLAND. Yes, it *was* a chance. He found a purse in the gutter, and he returned it to the owner before he had made up his mind whether to keep it or not. So they said he was honest! He knew he wasn't! He knew that he had returned it because there was so much money in it that he was afraid to keep it, but he never told them that. And when the man who owned the purse gave him a job, he worked — worked because he was afraid not to work — worked so that he wouldn't have any time to think, because he knew that if he began to think, he would begin to steal! Then they said he was a hard worker, and they promoted him: they made him manager. That gave him more chances to steal, but there were so many men watching him, so many men anxious for him to make a slip so that they might climb over him, that he didn't dare.

[*He pauses.*]

THE GIRL. And then?

STRICKLAND. The rest was easy. Nothing succeeds like a good reputation, and he didn't steal because he knew they'd catch him. [*He pauses again.*] But he wasn't honest at bottom! The rotten streak was still there! After twenty-eight years things began to be bad. He speculated: lost all the money he could call his own, and he made up his mind to take other money that *wasn't* his own, all he could lay his hands on, and run off with it! It was wrong! It was the work of a lifetime gone to hell! But it was the rottenness in him coming to the surface! It was the thief he thought dead coming to life again!

THE GIRL [*after a pause*]. What a pity!

STRICKLAND. He had been honest so long — he had made other people think that he was honest so long, that he had made *himself* think that he was honest!

THE GIRL. Was he wrong, Mr. Strickland?

STRICKLAND [*looking into her eyes; very quietly*]. Stevens, please. [*There is a long pause.*] I don't know what sent you: who sent you: but you've come here to-night as I am running away. You're too late. You can't stop me. Not even

the finger of God Himself could stop me! I've gone too far. [*He goes on in a voice which is low, but terrible in its earnestness.*] Here is money! [*He pulls out his pocketbook.*] Hundreds of thousands of it, not a cent of it mine! And I'm stealing it, do you understand me? *Stealing* it! To-morrow the firm will be bankrupt, and there'll be a reward out for me. [*He smiles grimly, and bows.*] Here, if you please, is your honest man! What have you to say to him?

THE GIRL [*very quietly*]. The man who has been honest so long that he has made *himself* think that he is honest *can't* steal!

STRICKLAND [*hoarsely*]. You believe *that?*

THE GIRL [*opening her bag again*]. I was left a little money this week: only a few hundred dollars, hardly enough to bother you with. Will you take care of it for me — Alfred Stevens?

STRICKLAND. Good God!

[*And utterly unnerved he collapses to a chair. There is a long pause.*]

THE GIRL [*crossing slowly to the window, and drawing aside the curtain*]. Look! What a beautiful night! The thousands of sleeping houses! The millions of shining stars! And the lights beneath! And in the distance, how the stars and the lights meet! So that one cannot say: "Here Gods ends; Here Man begins."

[*The telephone rings, harshly, and shrilly. Strickland goes to the receiver.*]

STRICKLAND [*quietly*]. Yes? . . . You're afraid I'm going to miss the train? . . . Yes? Well, I'm *going* to miss the train! . . . I'm going to stay and face the music! [*Hysterically.*] I'm an honest man, d'ye hear me? I'm an honest man. [*And furiously, he pitches the telephone to the floor, and stands panting, shivering, on the spot. From the window a soft radiance beckons, and trembling in every limb, putting out his hands as if to ward off some unseen obstacle, he moves there slowly.*] Did you hear what I told him? I'm going to make good. I'm going to face the music! Because I'm an honest man! An honest man!

[*He gasps, stops abruptly, and in a sudden panic-stricken movement, tears the curtains down. The window is closed — has never been opened — but the girl has vanished. And as Strickland, burying his face in his hands, drops to his knees in awe,*

The Curtain Falls.]

NIGHT

A Play

By Sholom Asch

Translated by Jack Robbins.
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NIGHT was originally produced by the East-West Players, at the Berkeley Theatre, New York City, April 7, 1916, with the following cast:

THE OUTCAST [*prostitute*].....*Miriam Reinhardt.*
THE DRUNKARD.....*Mark Hoffman.*
THE BEGGAR.....*Maxim Vodianoy.*
THE BASTARD.....*Jack Dickler.*
THE FOOL.....*Max Lieberman.*
THE THIEF.....*Gustav Blum.*
HELENKA.....*Elizabeth Meltzer.*
THE DRUNKARD'S WIFE.....*Bryna Zaranov.*

Produced under the direction of GUSTAV BLUM.

Applications for permission to produce NIGHT must be addressed to Mr. Sholom Asch, 3 Bank Street, New York.

NIGHT

A Play

By Sholom Asch

[*Night in a market place. A small fire burns near a well. On a bench near it sleeps the Beggar. The old Prostitute is warming herself. There is the sound of dogs barking in the distance. Vast shadows move about the market-place. The Drunkard emerges from the gloom of the night.*]

Drunkard. Good evening, Madam Prostitute. [*Listens to the dogs.*] Why are the dogs whining like this to-night?

Prostitute. They must be seeing things.

Drunkard. Yes, your black soul. Perhaps they think you a devil. That's why they chase all over the butchers' stalls. No wonder. They've reason to be afraid.

Beggar [*in his sleep*]. He-he-he. Ha-ha-ha.

Prostitute. A drunkard and a prostitute are the same thing. None of us is clean of sin.

Beggar [*sleepily*]. Don't take me for a "pal."

[*Sleeps on.*]

Drunkard. Leave him alone. He sings hymns the whole day long.

Beggar. Poverty is no sin.

Drunkard. Don't mix in. [*To the Prostitute.*] What do dogs see at night?

Prostitute. They say that on the first of May the Holy Mother walks through the market place, and gathers all the stray souls.

Drunkard. What have the dogs got to do with it?

Prostitute. They are people laden with sins. People who died without the Holy Sacrament, and who were buried outside of the fence. At night they roam about the market in the shape of dogs. They run about in the stalls of the butchers. The devil, too, stays there, but when the first of May comes and the prayers begin, the Holy Mother walks through the market-place. The souls of the damned cling to her dress, and she takes them with her to Heaven.

[*Pause for a minute.*]

Beggar [*turning in his sleep*]. Strong vinegar bursts the cask. Her soul must be black indeed.

Drunkard. It's awful to look into it. You'll be among them yet . . .

Prostitute. I'm not afraid of that. The mercy of God is great. It will reach even me. But all of you will be among the dogs too. Those who live in the street come back to the street after death.

Beggar. The street is the home of the beggar. Poverty is no sin.

[*Stretches himself and sleeps on. There is a pause. The Fool comes out of the darkness. He is tall, with a vacant, good-humored face, dressed in a soldier's hat, with a wooden toy-sword in his girdle. He grins kindly.*]

Drunkard. Ah, good evening, Napoleon. [*He salutes the Fool.*] Where do you hail from?

Fool [*grins and chuckles*]. From Turkey. I have driven out the Turk.

Drunkard. And where is your army?

Fool. I have left it on the Vistula.

Drunkard. And when will you drive the Russians out of there?

Fool. I have given my orders already.

Drunkard. Are they being carried out?

Fool. I only need to draw my sword.

Drunkard. Your sword?

Fool. Napoleon gave it to me.

Prostitute. Leave him be. Every one is crazy in his way. [*To the fool.*] You are cold. Come to the fire. He wanders about the hollows the whole night long.

FOOL [*smiles*]. I've quartered all of my soldiers, but I have no place for myself to sleep in.

PROSTITUTE. A fool, and yet he knows what he says. [*Gives him bread.*] Do you want to eat?

FOOL. I get my dinner from the tables of Kings.

BEGGAR [*awaking*]. You've brought the fool here too? He's got the whole market place to be crazy in, and he comes here, where honest people sleep.

[*Takes his stick and tries to reach the Fool.*]

PROSTITUTE [*defending the Fool*]. Leave him alone I tell you. Crazy though he be, he still wants to be among people. Like aches for like.

BEGGAR. Let him go to the graveyard, and yell his craziness out among the graves; — and not disturb honest men in their sleep. The street is the beggar's home, and I don't want to share it with madmen. All that the people throw out of their homes, wanders into the street.

[*He chases the Fool away, and lies down.*]

DRUNKARD. Who made you boss here? The street belongs to all. Lie down in the city hall, in the mayor's bed, if you want to have rest.

PROSTITUTE. Keep still. He has a right to the place. He's had it long enough.

DRUNKARD. What kind of a right? Are you a newcomer? How long have you been here?

PROSTITUTE. All my life. I was born in the street, there, behind the fence near the church. My mother pointed out the place to me. I have never known any other home, but the street. In the daytime it belongs to all. When people open their shops, and peasants come in their wagons, and trade begins, I feel a stranger here, and I hide in the fields near the cemetery. But when night comes, and people retire into their holes, then the street is mine. I know every nook and corner of the market place. It is my home.

DRUNKARD. You've said it well. In that house there, I have a home, a bed, and a wife. In the daytime I work there. I sit among boots, and drive nails into heels and soles. And I bear my wife's nagging and cursing patiently. . . . But when night comes I can't stand it any longer. The house becomes too small for me. Something draws me into the street.

PROSTITUTE. It is the curse of the street that rests on you as it does on the howling dogs. All of us are damned, and we are punished here for our sins. And we will not be delivered, till the Holy Mother will come, and we will take hold of her dress, and our souls will be freed.

BEGGAR [*in his sleep*]. He-he-he. Ha-ha-ha.

DRUNKARD [*becomes sad, bows his head*]. In the daytime I don't mind it. Then I am like other people. I work like all do. But when night comes . . .

PROSTITUTE. It's the curse of the street. Don't worry. God will pity all of us. His mercy is great.

[*The cry of a child comes from the distance. It resembles the howling of a dog.*]

DRUNKARD. What's that?

PROSTITUTE. That's Manka's bastard. He strays the street. He wants to come near the fire.

DRUNKARD. Call him here.

PROSTITUTE. Keep still. [*She points to the Beggar.*] He will chase the boy away. They believe the boy is born of the Devil.

DRUNKARD. Who made him boss here? All of us are children of the Devil. [*He calls to the boy as one calls to a dog.*] Come here, you.

[*A dumb boy, all in rags, drags himself near. He makes noises like a little beast. He trembles with cold. The Prostitute tries to quiet him.*]

PROSTITUTE. He lies the whole night behind his mother's doorstep. She is afraid of her husband. Sometimes she gives him a piece of bread, when no one looks. Thus he crawls like a worm in the street — human flesh and blood.

DRUNKARD. Let him come near the fire — so. [*He pushes the boy nearer to the fire.*] Give him a piece of bread. I'll take care of any one who tries to hurt him.

BEGGAR [*awaking*]. No. That's too much. Who brought this here? You know that the Devil is in him?

[*Tries to chase the boy away.*]

PROSTITUTE [*hiding the boy in her shawl*]. Have pity.

BEGGAR. You're the Devil's wife. That's why you pity his child.

[*Tries to reach the boy.*]

DRUNKARD [*tears the stick from the Beggar's hand*]. We're all the children of the Devil. You've no more on your hide than he has.

BEGGAR. Don't you start anything. I am a Christian, and believe in God. I've no home. That's why I sleep on the street. Every dog finds his hole. But I won't live together with the Devil. And I won't be the neighbor of a harlot either. Nor was a drunkard ever a friend of mine. [*He gathers his belongings.*] What are you running after me for? This whole street belongs to the Devil. Why are you trying to stop me?

[*He tries to go away.*]

PROSTITUTE [*detaining him*]. Don't leave us. Let him only warm himself. He'll go away.

BEGGAR. It does me little honor to be with folk like you anyway.

[*He goes away.*]

DRUNKARD. Why do you hold him back? Let him go if he thinks us below his dignity.

PROSTITUTE. And do you really think it an honor for one to remain with you? That man is decent at least.

DRUNKARD. Ah, you grow pious as you grow old.

PROSTITUTE. I have always wanted to be in decent company.

[*As the Beggar disappears, strange figures begin to show themselves in the darkness. Most of them are half-naked. The Fool also comes back. A dog comes wandering into the crowd.*]

PROSTITUTE [*looking around in terror*]. It's awful to be with so many sick people. Not one amongst them who is of sound mind. Not one who has a clean conscience. The Beggar has gone away.

DRUNKARD [*with fear*]. The dogs have also come to the fire.

PROSTITUTE. Even they are drawn to people.

[*There is a short pause. The Bastard begins to wail.*]

DRUNKARD. What's the trouble with him? Take him away.

PROSTITUTE. That's the Devil in him crying — see him gazing at something.

[*The day begins to grow gray in the east. Strange, awful light falls over all. Now one, now another corner of the street appears and disappears. All is covered with shadows as in twilight.*]

DRUNKARD. Praised be God. The dawn.

PROSTITUTE. How different the light is to-day.

[*The dogs begin to howl.*]

DRUNKARD. What are the dogs howling about? Chase them away from the fire.

PROSTITUTE. They are looking somewheres. They sniff at the air. They must see something now.

[*In the distance is heard the sound of beating against tin plates. The dogs howl with fright.*]

PROSTITUTE. Something is coming near to us.

[*The Fool laughs.*]

DRUNKARD. What is the Fool laughing at? What is he gazing at? Chase him away from the fire.

PROSTITUTE. They all see more clearly than we.

[*The dogs howl again, and gather in one group. Footsteps approach.*]

DRUNKARD [*frightened*]. Something is coming near to us.

[*A minute's pause. All waiting in fear. The Thief appears. He carries a woman on his shoulders. The woman has a child in her arms. They are followed by small, poorly clad boys who hold trumpets and kettles in their hands, and make as much noise as they can.*]

THIEF [*thunders*]. Fall on your knees. Draw off your hats! Do you see who is coming? The queen! The queen! [*All grow pale, and move aside. The Thief walks into their midst.*] Who is there? Ah, the Fool. Well, how are your armies getting along? Hold them in readiness. Hold them in readiness. The Drunkard! Ah, the right man for the game. [*He bows.*] With awe do I kiss the little hand of Madame Prostitute. [*To the Bastard*]: And your little heir is here also? [*To the woman*]: Take them with you, oh, Queen. They too are dogs like us, thrown into the street. Let them come with us. We have room for many, many.

WOMAN. Take them with us, my man. We will all go together.

THIEF [*letting the Woman down*]. Our company is growing big. Come with us.

DRUNKARD [*awaking from his torpor and looking at the Thief*]. So you are the thief they let out of prison not long ago. And I was afraid of you a little while ago. [*He spits.*] That's a fine joke. Always at your play. Who's the woman, and the children? Where did you get them?

THIEF. Brother, this is not play. [*He points to the Woman.*] She is a queen. [*He points to the children.*] And they are princes. Every one a prince. At your knees before her! Take off your hat.

DRUNKARD. I know this gentleman quite well. He likes to joke.

[*The Thief comes close to him.*]

THIEF. To-night is the night when the dogs are delivered. Look at her. [*He points at the Woman.*] Look at us. We were locked in, and we have come out. We are all one family — dogs. We wander on the street. Men have shut their doors in our faces. Come, dogs. We will unite to-day. Throw off your chains, and shake yourself as if you were shaking dust from your shoulders. You are men after all. I have known you from childhood. I knew your mother.

DRUNKARD [*wondering*]. I don't know what you mean.

THIEF. Look at yourself. What have they made of you? You walk the street all night like an outcast. Your children are afraid of you. They hide when they see you drunk on the street, and weep for you. Are you to blame for it? You were made one with a mass of flesh you hate. You sit bent over your boots the whole day long, and curses and blows are hurled at your head. And when night comes you crawl in the gutter, and you will crawl there till you will be freed from shame.

DRUNKARD. What are you telling me this for?

THIEF. And are you to blame for this? Have you had one minute of happiness in your whole life? Who took care of you? You were raised by your stepfather's cane. Show me the scars on your body. They beat you from childhood on; first your stepfather, then your "step-wife." No one ever spoke to you as to a friend. No one ever comforted you in your grief.

[*The Drunkard falls to the ground and weeps.*]

THIEF [*to the Woman*]. And he is an honest man. I know him. We went to the same school. He had an honest mother. She loved him only as a mother can. [*Whispering to the Woman.*] She brought him bread behind his stepfather's back.

DRUNKARD. I will never drink again. I give my word of honor.

[*He weeps.*]

THIEF. Don't cry, brother. We are all dogs of the street. But we unite to-day. Come with us, come. We will care for you. We will all be together. Take the Prostitute, and come with us.

[*The old Prostitute rises and looks amazed.*]

PROSTITUTE. Me?

THIEF [*taking her hand*]. We will not turn you, nor avoid you. We know what you are. You are not to blame. Who brought you up? Who was your mother? You were born in the street like a goat. Every stone, every hole in the earth caresses you like a mother. You were thrown into the street at birth, and men ran from you as from a leper. Any wonder that this is what became of you? You lay in the street like an old, dirty rag.

PROSTITUTE [*half-crying*]. I am not worthy of such comforting words by a gentleman.

THIEF. You are worthy. You are like all of us. Your skin is dirty, but your soul is clean. Wash your sins away, throw the curse from off your shoulders, and you will become a human being like all of us. You too long for people. I know you. You are good, you love humanity. It is they who have cursed you so. You were always a clean child. Wait. Wait. [*He takes water from the well and pours it on her.*] I wash your head, and you are a human being like the rest of us. The curse is removed from you. Look around yourself. Spring is here. Its fragrance is everywhere. You are a girl yet, a mere child. You know no wickedness. You are in your father's garden. Your mother sits near the win-

dow and looks at you. You are walking with your beloved.

[*He takes the Drunkard, puts him side by side with the Prostitute, joins their hands, and leads them back and forth.*]

PROSTITUTE [*smiles*]. Don't talk to me like that.

THIEF. You are being married now. Virgins come and bring you your bridal dress, your veil, your myrtle wreath. You are chaste. They lead you to the altar. Your mother lays her hand on your head and blesses you. Sweet harp music is heard. Your bridegroom takes his place beside you.

[*The Prostitute breaks out into tears.*]

DRUNKARD [*excited*]. I will be together with her. I will defend her. I will not let them insult her. She is my sister. I will work for her.

THIEF. That's the way. The dogs unite to-day. [*He takes the Bastard in his arms and kisses him on the forehead.*] And, he, too, is our child. All of us are dogs of the street. All of us unite to-day.

DRUNKARD [*takes the boy from the Thief*]. He is our child. He will be with us. [*He takes the arm of the Prostitute.*] Come, we will go together. I will work for you. You will bring him up, and he will be our child. [*He takes the shawl from the Prostitute, and wraps himself and the boy in it.*] What? You do not hear? Listen. I mean it with my whole heart.

[*The Prostitute does not hear. She looks with awe at the Woman.*]

THIEF. That's the way. That's the way. That's the way. To-day we unite. We go together. We will be one with the dogs. [*He caresses all he finds on the street.*] Blow the trumpets, boys. Beat the drums. We choose a queen to-day. [*To the Fool.*] The army waits for you, with swords in their hands, with spears ready. Do you see the cannon all trained? All wait for your command. Do you see the foe around you? [*He points to the street with a broad majestic gesture.*] Here stands the army.

FOOL [*happily*]. Yes, yes.

THIEF. Give your order, Napoleon. You are our general. Draw the sword, and command!

FOOL [*draws his wooden sword and cries loudly as if he saw an army in the market-place*]. Present arms!

THIEF [*loudly*]. That's the way. The dogs unite to-day. All will unite. We choose a queen to-day. [*He points to the Woman.*] She is worthy of wearing the crown of the street. Come, queen. Mount to your throne. [*He bends his back.*] Boys, blow your trumpets. Beat your drums. At your knees. All hats off. The queen comes. The queen comes. So will we go to our land.

[*It is grown lighter. The face of the Woman has grown young and beautiful, and begins to look like the face of the Holy Mother.*]

PROSTITUTE [*who has looked at the Woman with awe, recognizes her in the gray light, as she sits on the Thief's shoulders with the child in her arms. She falls to her knees before her, and cries in an unearthly voice*]. Oh, see, see. It is the Holy Mother. Look at her — her face. She has come from the church. Oh, it is the holy picture before which I always pray. I know her. Our Holy Mother in her very flesh. [*She gives a great cry, and falls prostrate before the Woman.*] Oh, Mother, Mother, take me under Thy protection. [*She falls prostrate, unable to talk any more. The others are infected with the spirit of her words. They look with fear at the Woman's face. They recognize the Madonna. They bend half-ways on their knees. The Thief, who has let her down from his shoulders, takes off his hat and kneels with the rest. All prostrate themselves. There is the sound of a church-bell. It is day. From the open window of a house across the way, leans out the wife of the Drunkard, and yells.*] Ah, ah, what are you doing there. Come into the house. There is work to be done.

DRUNKARD [*roused from his ecstasy, tears his hand away from that of the Prostitute, and looks at the Woman with the Thief.*] Ha-ha-ha. That's Helenka, Andrey the Plasterer's wife. Ha-ha-ha. He's cracked a good joke.

[*He runs away. The others awake as if from sleep. The Prostitute suddenly rises. Helenka tries to escape from the Thief's hands.*]

HELENKA. Why did you drag me into the street?

THIEF [*holding her hand.*] Come with me. Remember what we said. Come to another land with me.

HELENKA [*weeping*]. What does he want with me? Why did he drag me into the street? Come home, children.

[*All run from him.*]

THIEF [*stands near the well, and thunders after them*]. Dogs, where are you running? . . . You dogs, you damned dogs . . . [*Townspeople come to the well with pails, grumbling.*] Get out of the way . . .

[*Curtain.*]

FORGOTTEN SOULS

A Play

By David Pinski

Translated and Edited by Isaac Goldberg, Ph.D.

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PERSONS

FANNY SEGAL [*owner of a tailoring establishment*].
LIZZIE EHRLICH [*a pianist*], } [*Miss Segal's boarders*].
HINDES [*a teacher*], }

PLACE: *A Russian Provincial Town.*
TIME: *1916.*

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FORGOTTEN SOULS

A Play

By David Pinski

[Scene: *Workroom at Fanny Segal's. A door to the left of the spectator, another in the back. A large table, covered with various materials; at each side of the table a sewing machine. On the wall to the right, a three-panelled mirror; in the corner, a large wardrobe. Not far from the wardrobe two dressmaker's forms, covered with cloaks. In the middle a broad armchair. Evening.*]

Fanny [*runs out through the rear door and soon returns with a letter in her hand. She tears it nervously open and is absorbed in reading. Suddenly she gives a scream of delight*]. Oh! — Oh! [*Passes her hand over her face and through her hair, looks at the letter, cries out anew, breathing with difficulty. Looks at the letter once more, and exclaims heavily.*] You! My love! My love! [*She is lost for a moment in thought, then calls.*] Lizzie! Lizzie! Lizzie!

Lizzie [*enters, dressed up as if for a ball, sticking a pin in her hat. Mocks Fanny's tone.*] What's up? What's up? What's up?

Fanny. Read this! Quickly! It's from Berman!

Lizzie [*takes the letter*]. Why see! We've just been talking about him. And they really accepted his drama?

[*Looks at the letter.*]

Fanny [*looks on, too, in great excitement*].

Lizzie [*as she reads*]. That's fine! [*Turns over a page and continues reading.*] Why! This is an actual proposal if marriage, Fanny, my dear!

Fanny [*her breath short from delight*]. Did you understand it that way, too?

Lizzie [*still looking at the letter*]. How can it be interpreted otherwise? [*About to read the letter aloud.*] Ahem! [*Reads with a certain solemnity.*] "My drama has been accepted and will be produced this very winter. The conditions of the contract are first-rate, and the director promises me a great success, and incidentally a great reputation." [*Reads over some passages in an indistinct nasal monotone, then continues.*] "My! You ought to see me now. — I've sung and danced so much that it'll be a wonder to me if I'm not asked to move. I feel so strong. And now to write, to create, to do things!" [*Reads again in a nasal monotone, and soon with greater solemnity than before, and a certain tenderness.*] "And now, I hope, better days are in store for us, happiness of such a nature that you cannot be indifferent to it." [*Stops reading.*] That's a bit veiled, but it's plain talk just the same. [*Gives Fanny the letter. Speaks lovingly.*] Lucky woman! My darling Fanny! [*Embraces her.*] You dear! [*Kisses her.*]

Fanny. So that's the way you understand it, too? [*Speaks in gasps, trembling all over.*] Oh! Oh!

[*Covers her face with the letter, takes it to her lips and breathes with difficulty. She takes from her right sleeve a handkerchief and wipes her eyes.*]

Lizzie [*moved, embracing her with both arms*]. My dear Fanny! How happy I am! You dear, you! [*Dreamily.*] Now I know how I'll play at the Ginsbergs' to-night! I'll put my whole soul into the music, and it will be the merriest, cheeriest soul that ever lived in the world.

Fanny [*bends down and kisses her forehead*]. My faithful friend!

Lizzie. At last! My dream's come true!

Fanny [*drops into the armchair*]. Your dream?

LIZZIE [*takes a piece of cloth from the table, spreads it out on the floor, and kneels before Fanny*]. Listen. I dreamed for you a hero before whom the world, even before seeing him, would bare its head. I dreamed for you a triumphal march of powerful harmonies, a genius, a superman, such as only you deserve.

FANNY. Sh! Sh! Don't talk like that!

LIZZIE. No, no. You can't take that away from me. As long as I shall live I'll never cease admiring you. There aren't many sisters in the world like you. Why, you never have given a thought to yourself, never a look, but have worked with might and main to make a somebody out of your sister. I'll tell you the truth. I've often had the most unfriendly feelings toward your sister Olga. She takes it so easy there in Petrograd, while you —

FANNY [*tenderly*]. You're a naughty girl.

LIZZIE. I simply couldn't see how things went on,— how you were working yourself to death.

FANNY. But that was my happiness, and now I am amply repaid for it, to see Olga placed upon an independent footing, with a great future before her as a painter.

LIZZIE. That kind of happiness did not appeal very much to me. I wanted, for you, a different kind of happiness,— the happiness of being a wife, of being a mother, of loving and being loved.

FANNY [*in a reverie*]. I had already weaned my thoughts away from love and family life as the only happiness.

LIZZIE. You poor soul!

FANNY. When my mother died, my road was clearly mapped out for me: to be to my sister, who is eight years younger than I, both a father and a mother. That purpose was great and holy to me. I never thought of anything else. Only in the early twenties, between twenty-two and twenty-five, a longing for something else came to me. Not that my sister became a burden to me, God forbid, but I wanted something more, a full life, happiness and — love. At that time I used to cry very much, and wet my pillow with my tears, and I was very unhappy. And I was easily angered then, too, so you see I was far from an angel.

LIZZIE [*draws Fanny nearer, and kisses her*]. You darling, you!

FANNY. But later the longing left me, as if it had been charmed away. Olga grew older, and her talents began to ripen. Then I forgot myself altogether, and she became again my sole concern.

LIZZIE. And is that all?

FANNY. What else can there be? Of course, when my sister went to Petrograd she was no longer under my immediate care and I was left all alone. The old longing re-awoke in my bosom but I told myself that one of my years had no right to expect happiness and love? So I determined to tear out, to uproot from my heart every longing. I tried to convince myself that my goal in life had already been attained — that I had placed a helpless child securely upon her feet —

LIZZIE. But you loved Berman all the time, didn't you?

FANNY. Yes, I loved him all the time, but I fought my feelings. Life had taught me to restrain and to suppress my desires. I argued: He is too far above me —

LIZZIE. Too far above you?

FANNY [*continuing*]. And I am too worn-out for him. And furthermore, I tried to make myself believe that his daily visits here were accidental, that they were not intended for me at all, but for his friend and nephew Hindes, who happens to board with me.

LIZZIE. But how could you help perceiving that he was something more than indifference to you? You must have been able to read it in his eyes.

FANNY [*smiling*]. Well, you see how it is! And perhaps for the very reason that I had abandoned all ideas of love, and had sought to deceive myself into believing that I was a dried-up twig on the tree of live —

LIZZIE [*jumping up*]. My! How you sinned against yourself!

FANNY [*rising*]. But now the sap and the strength flow again within me,— now I am young once more.— Ah! Life, life! — To enjoy it, to drink it down in copious draughts, to feel it in every pulsebeat — Oh, Lizzie, play me a triumphal march, a song of joy, of jubilation . . .

LIZZIE. So that the very walls will dance and the heavens join in the chorus. [*Goes to the door at the left, singing.*] "Joy, thou goddess, fair, immortal, daughter of Elysium, Mad with rapture—" [*Suddenly stops.*] Sh! Hindes is coming!

[*Listens.*]

FANNY [*she has been standing as if entranced; her whole body trembles as she awakens to her surroundings. She puts her finger to her nose, warningly.*] Don't say a word to him about it.

LIZZIE. I will! He must know it, he must be happy over it, too. And if he truly loves you, he will be happy to learn it. And then, once for all he'll get rid of his notions about winning you.

FANNY. Don't be so inconsiderate.

LIZZIE. Leave it to me! . . . Hindes! Hindes!

FANNY. It's high time you left for the Ginsbergs'.

LIZZIE. I've a few minutes yet . . . Hindes! Hindes!

HINDES [*appears at the rear door. He wears spectacles; under his left arm a crutch, under his right arm books, and in his hands various bags of food*].

FANNY [*steals out through the door at the left*].

HINDES. Good evening. What's the news?

LIZZIE. Come here! Quick! Fa—

HINDES. Won't you give me time to carry my parcels into my room?

LIZZIE. Not even a second! Fanny has—

HINDES [*taking an apple from a bag*]. Have an apple.

LIZZIE [*refusing it*]. Let me speak, won't you! Fa—

HINDES. May I at least sit down?

LIZZIE [*loudly*]. Fanny has received a letter from Berman!

HINDES [*taking a seat*]. Saying that his drama has been accepted. I, too, have received a letter from Berman.

LIZZIE. That's nothing. The point is that he is seeking to make a match with her. He has practically proposed to her.

HINDES [*astonished*]. Practically proposed? To Fanny?

LIZZIE. Yes, and when Fanny comes back you just see to it that you wish her a right friendly congratulation, and that you make no—[*Stops suddenly.*] Hm! I came near saying something silly.—Oh, I'm so happy, and I'd just have the whole world happy with me. Do you hear? You must help her celebrate, do you hear? And now, good night to you, for I must run along to the Ginsbergs'.

[*Turns to the door at the left singing: "Joy, thou goddess, fair, immortal . . ."*]

HINDES [*calling after her*]. But—the devil. Miss Ehrlich!

LIZZIE [*at the door*]. I haven't a single moment to spare for the devil.

[*She disappears.*]

HINDES [*grunts angrily, throws his crutch to the ground, places his books and his packages on a chair, and mumbles*]. What mockery is this!

[*Takes out a letter from his inside pocket and reads it over several times. Grunts again. Rests his head heavily upon his hands, and looks vacantly forward, as if deeply puzzled.*]

FANNY [*enters, embarrassed*]. Good evening, Hindes!

HINDES [*mumbles, without changing his position*]. Good evening!

FANNY [*looks at him in embarrassment, and begins to busy herself with the cloaks on the forms.*]

HINDES [*still in the same position. He taps his foot nervously. He soon ceases this, and speaks without looking at Fanny*]. Miss Segal, will you permit me to see Berman's letter?

FANNY [*with a nervous laugh*]. That's a bit indiscreet—not at all like a cavalier.

HINDES [*same position and same tone*]. Will you permit me to see Berman's letter?

FANNY [*with a laugh of embarrassment, throws him the letter, which she has been holding in her sleeve*]. Read it, if that's how you feel.

HINDES [*bends slowly down, gets the letter, commences to read it, and then to grumble*]. H'm! So! [*He lets the letter fall to his knee, and stares vacantly before him. He shakes his foot nervously and mumbles as if to himself.*] To be such an idiot!

FANNY [*regards him with astonishment*].

HINDES [*somewhat more softly*]. To be such an idiot!

FANNY [*laughing, still embarrassed*]. Who?

HINDES. Not I.

[*Picks up his crutch, the books and the parcels, arises, and gives the letter to Fanny.*]

FANNY [*beseechingly*]. Hindes, don't take it so badly. You make me very sad.

HINDES. I'm going to my room, so you won't see me.

FANNY [*as before*]. Don't speak to me like that, Hindes. Be my good friend, as you always were. [*In a lower tone, embarrassed.*] And be good to Berman. For you know, between us, between you and me, there could never have been anything more than friendship.

HINDES. There is no need of your telling me that. I know what I know and have no fault to find with you.

FANNY. Then why are you so upset, and why do you reproach yourself?

HINDES. Because . . .

FANNY. Because what?

HINDES [*after an inner struggle, stormily*]. Because I am in a rage! To think of a chap writing such a veiled, ambiguous, absolutely botched sentence, and cooking up such a mess!

FANNY. What do you mean by all this?

HINDES. You know, Miss Segal, what my feelings are toward you, and you know that I wish you all happiness. I assure you that I would bury deep within me all my grief and all my longing, and would rejoice with a full heart — if things were as you understood them from Berman's letter.

FANNY. As I understood them from Berman's letter?

HINDES.— And what rouses my anger and makes me hesitate is that it should have had to happen to you and that I must be the surgeon to cut the cataract from your eye.

FANNY [*astounded*]. Drop your rhetorical figures. End your work. Cut away, since you've begun the cutting.

HINDES [*without looking at her, deeply stirred*]. Berman did not mean you.

FANNY. Not me?

HINDES. Not you, but your sister.

FANNY [*with an outcry*]. Oh! —

HINDES. He writes me that his first meeting with her was as if the splendor of God had suddenly shone down upon him,— that gradually he was inflamed by a fiery passion, and that he hopes his love is returned, that . . .

FANNY [*falls upon a chair, her face turned toward the table. She breaks into moaning*]. She has taken from me everything!

[*In deepest despair, with cries from her innermost being, she tears at her hair.*]

HINDES [*drops his books and packages to the floor. Limps over to Fanny, and removes her hands from her head*]. You have good reason to weep, but not to harm yourself.

FANNY [*hysterically*]. She has taken from me everything! My ambition to study, my youth, my fondest hopes, and now . . .

HINDES. And now? — Nothing. As you see, Berman never loved you. If it hadn't been for that unfortunate, ambiguous, absolutely botched, simply idiotic sentence . . .

FANNY [*softly*]. Hindes, I feel that I no longer care to live.

HINDES. Folly!

FANNY. I feel as if my heart had been torn in two. My soul is empty, desolate . . . as if an abyss had opened before me . . . What have I now in life for? I can live no longer!

HINDES. Folly! Nonsense!

FANNY. I have already lived my life . . .

HINDES. Absurd!

FANNY [*resolutely*]. I know what I'm talking about, and I know what to do.

[*Silence.*]

HINDES [*regarding her closely. With blunt emphasis*]. You're thinking now over what death you shall choose.

FANNY [*motionless*].

HINDES [*taking a seat*]. Let me tell you a story. There was once upon a time a man who — not through doubt and misfortune, but rather through good times and pleasures, came to the conclusion that life wasn't worth living. So he went off to buy a revolver. On his way a great clamor arose in the street. A house had caught fire and in a moment was in flames. Suddenly, at one of the windows in the top story there appeared a woman. The firemen had placed their highest ladders against the building and a man

began to climb up. That man was none other than our candidate for suicide. He took the woman out of the window, gave her to the firemen who had followed him up, and then went through the window into the house. The surrounding crowd trembled with fear lest the house should cave in at the very last moment. Flames already appeared at the window, and people were sure that the hero had been burned to death inside. But he had not been burned; he soon appeared on the roof, with a small child in his arms. The ladders could not reach to this height, so the firemen threw him a rope. He tied the rope about the child and lowered it to the firemen. But he himself was beyond rescue. He folded his hands over his heart, and tears trickled from his eyes. He, who but a moment before had sought death, now desired not to die. No, he wanted to live, for in that moment he had found a purpose: to live and to do good.

FANNY [*angrily*]. To do good! I'm tired of doing good!

HINDES. Don't sin against yourself, Fanny!

FANNY. Do good! I have done good; I have lived for others, not myself; and now you can see for yourself that I have not fulfilled my life. I feel as wretched as the most miserable, as the most wicked, and I long for death even as the most unhappy!

HINDES [*looking at her from under his spectacles*]. Does Olga know of your feelings toward Berman?

FANNY [*angrily*]. I don't know what she knows.

HINDES. Can't you give me any better reply than that?

FANNY. What can I know? I used to write her letters just full of Berman.

HINDES. Could Olga have gathered from them that you were not indifferently disposed toward him?

FANNY. What do you mean by this cross-examination?

HINDES. I have a notion that if you were to do what you have in your mind at present,— a thing I cannot bring myself to name,— then Olga would not accept Berman's love. Rather she would take her own life, since she would look upon herself as the cause of your death.

FANNY. What's this you've thought up?

HINDES. Just what you heard.

FANNY. And you mean —?

HINDES — That you know your sister and ought to realize what she's liable to do.

FANNY [*in a fit of anger*]. First she takes away my life, and now she will not let me die!

[*Her head sinks to the table.*]

HINDES. There spoke the true Fanny, the Fanny of yore.

FANNY [*weeps bitterly*].

HINDES. Well may you weep. Weep, Fanny, weep until the tears come no more. But when that is over, then dry your eyes and never weep again. Dry forever the source of all your tears. That's exactly what I did, do you understand? Such people as you and I, robbed of personal happiness, must either weep forever, or never weep at all. I chose the latter course. Harden yourself, Fanny, and then fold your arms on your breast and look fearlessly forward into life, fulfilling it as your heart dictates.

FANNY [*continues weeping*].

HINDES [*noticing Berman's letter on the table, takes it up and throws it down angrily*]. Such a botched, idiotic sentence! And he's a poet!

FANNY [*raising her head*]. If things are as you say, then Olga will in any case reject Berman. She will imagine that she is taking him away from me, and such a thing she would never do.

HINDES. Perhaps. [*Suddenly, bluntly.*] And what will be the effect of all this upon you?

FANNY [*brokenly*]. Who's thinking of self? I mean that I want her to have him.

HINDES. There's the old Fanny again!

FANNY. Ah! Enough of that! Better help me with some suggestion.

HINDES. Some suggestion? Be her matchmaker.

FANNY. And suppose she should turn the tables and want to be my matchmaker?

HINDES. We've got to think that over.

[*Silence.*]

FANNY [*brokenly*]. Hindes!

HINDES. What?

FANNY. I have an idea.

HINDES. Good.

FANNY. But I need your aid.

HINDES. Count on me, if I'm able.

FANNY. Do you promise?

HINDES. Blindly?

FANNY. Blindly.

HINDES [*looks at her*]. Why must I promise you blindly? If I'm able, you may be sure I'll help.

FANNY [*brokenly, yet in embarrassment*]. Take me . . . Marry me.

HINDES [*for a moment he looks at her, then picks up his crutch, his books and the packages*].

FANNY [*beseechingly*]. Hindes! If I should marry, Olga wouldn't have any obstacle in her way.

HINDES. Miss Segal, I have loved you, and still do. But I refuse to be the altar upon which you shall sacrifice yourself.

FANNY. But a moment ago you dissuaded me from death. Will you now drive me back to it?

HINDES. Your sister will be able to find happiness without Berman.

FANNY. But if she loves him? —

HINDES. Then she'll suffer, just as we do.

FANNY. No! Olga must not suffer! Do you hear! I'll not have it!

HINDES. That is very nice of you.

FANNY [*through her tears*]. Hindes, I no longer know you.

HINDES [*turns toward the door*]. Good night.

FANNY [*is overcome by sobbing*].

HINDES [*limps to the door, then stops. Looks downwards, then raises his eyes toward Fanny*]. Miss Segal, why is it that during all the time that I have boarded with you I have made no declaration of love, that I have never proposed marriage?

FANNY [*weeps*].

HINDES. I'll tell you. Wasn't it because I knew that you didn't love me, and because I wanted your love, not merely your respect?

FANNY [*firmly*]. No. You didn't do it simply because you knew that I would refuse you.

HINDES. And suppose I expected "Yes" from you?

FANNY. Then you would have proposed.

HINDES. And married you without your love?

FANNY. Yes.

HINDES. But then I didn't know that you loved another.

FANNY [*brokenly*]. The other no longer exists for me.

HINDES [*looks again at the floor. Silence*].

FANNY. Hindes!

HINDES. Yes?

FANNY. Come nearer to me.

HINDES. I am lame.

FANNY. Put all your bundles aside.

HINDES [*hesitates for a moment, then puts down his books and packages*].

FANNY [*as if in embarrassment*]. Everything . . . Everything . . .

HINDES [*bluntly*]. Don't be ashamed. Say just what you mean: Lay aside the crutch, too.

[*He lays aside the crutch.*]

FANNY [*arises, takes his hand*]. Hindes, you know my attitude toward you. You know how highly I esteem you, how happy I've always been to possess in you a good, true friend . . . [*Nestles her head against him, coyly.*] Embrace me, and give me a kiss, a hot, passionate kiss. Put into it your whole love, make it express your whole true soul. [*Brokenly, and in tears.*] I tell you, our life will be — happy. We souls, forgotten by happiness, will yet find it — in our own way — as best we can. [*Less tearfully.*] You'll see how it'll soon be. Lizzie will come home and she'll play us a march of jubilation, a march of joy . . . [*Brokenly.*] She owes it to me! . . . I'll dance, I tell you; I'll dance for two. You'll see. And I'll sing. I'll turn things upside down. Hindes, kiss me, hotly, hotly.

HINDES [*passionately, through tears*]. You . . . You . . .

[*He gives her a long kiss, as if entranced.*]

[*Slow Curtain.*]

BIBLIOGRAPHY
OF THE LITTLE THEATRE

FOREWORD

What is wanting in this list the reader will only too soon discover for himself. I do not, however, wish to offer a faltering apology for the incompleteness of the work. In truth, it needs none. Nevertheless, a brief word of explanation may not be amiss.

The duties of the bibliographer are more or less mechanical. He merely collects his data from the most available sources or from arcana known only to a few, arranges his material alphabetically and sends his copy to the printer.

The present list is an exception to the general practice. It will be noted that the bibliographer has broken his traces, forsaken his accustomed field and intruded, in some measure, upon the province of the critic. From the great mass of plays accessible in English I have sought to select only those which I hold best adapted to the little theater as it is to-day constituted. On the whole, they are plays which have encountered a certain measure of success or that I felt to be worthy of production. Rigid care has been taken to exclude such dramatic pieces which are fittingly described as "side-splitting farces." The latter contribute nothing to the art theater. Box and Cox, I doubt not, may be excruciatingly funny, but few would care to hear that Sam Hume, for instance, was about to produce it. Not that genuine laughter hasn't its place in the modern theater; but we cannot laugh to-day at the archaic drolleries of yesterday. We cannot abandon ourselves to papier-maché characterization in the theater. And this is what the art theater accomplished in its brief stay with us.

FRANK SHAY.

THE BOOKS OF THE LITTLE THEATRE

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THE PLAYS OF THE LITTLE THEATRE

ABBREVIATIONS

a — Allegory
c — Comedy
d — Drama
m — Masque
p — Play
s — Satire
m — Men, or Male Characters
w — Women, or Female Characters
j — Juvenile
i — Characters played by either sex

ABERCROMBIE, Lascelles
THE ADDER
AKINS, Zoe
DID IT REALLY HAPPEN?
THE MAGICAL CITY
SUCH A CHARMING YOUNG MAN
ALDRICH, Thos. Bailey
SISTERS' TRAGEDY
CORYDON, a Pastoral. 2m
PAULINE PAVLOVNA.
p. 1m 1w supers.....*Houghton*
ALDIS, Mary
PLAYS FOR SMALL STAGES
MRS. PAT AND THE LAW. p. 2m 2w 1j
THE DRAMA CLASS AT TANKAHA, NEV.
c 2m 9w
EXTREME UNCTION. d 1m 4w
THE LETTER. p 2m 1j
TEMPERAMENT. t 1m 2w
Five plays in one volume..*Duffield*
ANCEY, Georges. See "Four Plays for the Free Theatre."
ANDREWS, K.
AMERICA PASSES BY. p 2m 2w..*Baker*
ANDREYEV, Leonid
LOVE OF ONE'S NEIGHBOR.
s 15m 7w 1j.....*Shay*
D'ANNUNZIO, Gabriele
DREAM OF AN AUTUMN SUNSET
p 2m 4w.....*Poet Lore*
DREAM OF A SPRING MORNING.
p 3m 4w.....*Poet Lore*
ARISTOPHANES
LYSISTRATA. s 4m 5w 1j.....*French*
ARKELL, Reginald
COLUMBINE, a fantasy, 4m 1w...*S. & J.*
AUGIER, Emile
THE POSTSCRIPT. c 1m 2w.....*French*
AUGIER, Emile, and de MUSSET, Alfred
THE GREEN COAT. c 3m 1w....*French*
AUSTEN, Alfred
A LESSON IN HARMONY.
p 3m 1w.....*French*
BACON, Mrs. Josephine Dodge
THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS.
p 2 scenes.....*Kennerley*
BAKER, Elizabeth
MISS TASSY. p.....*Sidgwick*
BALLARD, J. Fred
THE GOOD NEWS.
d 3m 1w 1j.....*Harvard*
BANGS, John Kendrick
THE REAL THING, etc.
THE REAL THING. c 2m 5w
THE BARRINGTONS' "AT HOME."
c 2m 3w
THE RETURN OF CHRISTMAS.
c 4m 3w
THE SIDE SHOW. c 8m 3w
Four plays in one volume...*Harpers*
THE BICYCLERS, etc.
THE BICYCLERS. c 4m 3w
A DRAMATIC EVENING. c 4m 3w
THE FATAL MESSAGE. c 5m 4w
A PROPOSAL UNDER DIFFICULTIES.
c 3m 2w
Four plays in one volume...*Harpers*
BANNING, Kendall
"Copy." p 7m.....*Clinic*
deBANVILLE, Theodore
GRINGOIRE. c 4m 2w supers..*Poet Lore*
GRINGOIRE. c 4m 2w.....*Dramatic*
CHARMING LEANDRE. c 2m 1w....*French*
BARBER, M. E.
MECHANICAL JANE. c 3w.....*French*

BARGATE, John
The Prize. p 4m 3w.....*French*
BARKER, Granville
Rococo. f m w
Vote by Ballot. p m w
Farewell to the Theatre. p m w
Three plays in one volume....*Little*
Anatol. (*See* Schnitzler.)
BARRIE, James M.
Half Hours
Pantaloon. p 3m
The Twelve Pound Look. c 2m 2w
Rosalind. p. 1m 2w
The Will. p 6m 1w
Four plays in one vol..*Scribner's*
The Tragic Man.....*Scribner's*
Echoes of War
Old Lady Shows Her Medals.
p 1m 5w
The New World. p 2m 2w
Barbara's Wedding. p 3m 1w
A Well-Remembered Voice.
p 2m 2w
Four plays in one vol..*Scribner's*
BATES, W. O.
Polly of Pogue's Run.
p 6m 2w.....*Shay*
BEACH, Lewis
The Clod. p 4m 1w.....*Shay*
Brothers. p 3m .....*Shay*
A Guest for Dinner.....*Shay*
BECHHOFER, C. E.
Five Russian Plays, etc.
Evreinov, N. A Merry Death.
c 5m
Evreinov, N. The Beautiful Despot. c 5m 3w 1j
von Vizin, D. The Choice of a Tutor. c 5m 3w
Chekov, A. The Wedding.
c 9m 3w
Chekov, A. The Jubilee. c 5m 1w
Ukrainka, L. The Babylonian Captivity. d 1m 7i
Six plays in one vol....*Dutton*
BECQUE, Henri
The Vultures, etc.
The Merry-Go-Round,
c 4m 1w.....*Little*
BELL, Mrs. Hugh, and CECIL, A.
Time Is Money. c 1m 2w.....*French*
BELMONT, Mrs. O. H. P., and MAXWELL, Elsa
Melinda and Her Sisters.
p 6m 12w.....*Shores*
BEITH, Ian Hay
The Crimson Cocoanut, etc.
The Crimson Cocoanut, c 4m 2w
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The Third Man. c 1m 3w....*French*
BENEVENTE, Jacinto. Plays
His Widow's Husband. c 2m 5w
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No Smoking.
c 2m 2w.....*Drama, Feb.,* 1917
In the Place of Don Juan.
p 3m 2w.....*Poet Lore*
BENNETT, Arnold. Polite Farces
The Stepmother. c 2m 1w
A Good Woman. 3 cm 1w
A Question of Sex. c 2m 2w
Three plays in one volumn..*Doran*
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Holly Tree Inn. p 4m 3w....*French*
BERNARD, Tristan
French Without a Master.
c 5m 2w.....*French*
I'm Going! c 1m 1w.....*French*
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The Bridegroom. p 5m 6w
The Grandmother. p 3m 8w
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.....*Drama, May,* 1918
BLOCH, Bertram
The Maiden Over the Wall.
f 2m 1w.....*Drama, Aug.,* 1918
Morals and Circumstances.
p 2m 3w....*Smart Set, April,* 1919
BODENHEIM, Maxwell
The Wanderer. p 4m 2w..*Seven Arts*
The Master Poisoner
"In Minna and Myself".....*Pagan*
BONE, F. D.
A Daughter of Japan. d....*French*
Pride of the Regiment.
p 2m 1w.....*French*
BOTTOMLEY, Gordon
Laodice and Danae.
p 1m 5w.....*Four*
King Lear's Wife. p.....*Reynolds*
BOUCHOR, Maurice
A Christmas Tale. p 2m 2w..*French*

BOUCICAULT, Dion
MY LITTLE GIRL. d 3m 2w....*French*
LOVER BY PROXY. c 6m 4w....*French*
BOYCE, Neith, and HAPGOOD, Hutchins
ENEMIES. p 1m 1w.....*Shay*
BOYCE, Neith
THE TWO SONS. p 2m 2w.....*Shay*
BRAGDON, Claude
THE GIFT OF ASIA.
p 2m.....*Forum, March,* 1913
BRANCH, Anna Hempstead
THE ROSE OF THE WIND.
p 2m 2w.....*Houghton*
SHOES THAT DANCED.
p 3m 5w 1j.....*Houghton*
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THE MINISTER'S MESSENGER.
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c 2m 2w.....*French*
LONESOME-LIKE. p 2m 2w....*Phillips*
THE PRICE OF COAL. p
THE MAID OF FRANCE.
p 3m 2w.....*Phillips*
THE DOORWAY. p....*Joseph Williams*
SPRING IN BLOOMSBURY.
p.....*Joseph Williams*
BRIGGS, Caroline
ONE A DAY. c 5m.....*Shay*
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LITHUANIA. d 5m 2w.....*Chicago*
BROWN, Alice
JOINT OWNERS IN SPAIN.
c 4w.....*Baker*
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PEACE AT HOME. c 1m 1w. . . *Poet Lore*

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DAVID BALLARD
GENTLEMEN OF THE ROAD
LUCIFER
WHEN THE DEVIL WAS ILL.....*Bullen*

McFADDEN, Elizabeth A.
WHY THE CHIMES RANG.
p 1m 1w 2j.....*French*

MEGRUE, Roi Cooper
DOUBLE CROSS.
p 3m.....*Smart Set, Aug.*, 1911

MEILHAC and HALEVY
PANURGE'S SHEEP. c 1m 2w....*French*
INDIAN SUMMER. c 2m 2w.....*French*

MICHELSON, Miriam
BYGONES.
p 2m 1w....*Smart Set, March*, 1917

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Are published separately by Samuel French.
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THE REASON.
p 2m 2w.....*Smart Set, Sept.*, 1917
DE MILLE, William C.
IN 1999. c 1m 2w.....*French*
FOOD. c 2m 1w.....*French*
POOR OLD JIM. p 2m 1w.....*French*
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MILTON, John. Adapted by L. Chater
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Two scenes. c 4m 3w.....*French*
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SUMIDA GAWA.
d 2m 1w 1j....*Stratford, Jan.*, 1918
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DEPUE, ELVA. HATTIE. d 2m 3w
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